

JULY
15¢

A THRILLING
PUBLICATION

POPULAR DETECTIVE



In This Issue
**THREE EXCITING
NOVELETS**

Fish **FOR MURDER**

By **WYATT
BLASSINGAME**

HATFUL OF TROUBLE

By **ROGER FULLER**

A'HUNTING WE WILL GO

By **EDWARD CHURCHILL**

Terrific!



That's the word for **SEE**
America's favorite picture magazine
packed with glamorous and
entertaining photo features!

GET YOUR COPY TODAY!
NOW ON SALE—ONLY 15c AT ALL NEWSSTANDS!

DON'T READ ANOTHER WORD OF THIS ADVERTISEMENT



unless you're interested in a better job, a larger salary, greater responsibility! I. C. S. messages are not addressed to the idly curious—they're for the man who is curious with a purpose.

If you want to know how to start achieving advancement and success, we have important information for you.

We want to tell you that I. C. S. Courses covering more than 400 subjects are available for spare-time study at surprisingly low cost.

We want you to know that pay increases and job betterments are consistently reported to us by I. C. S. students in a volume as high as 600 and more letters a month.

Note, too, that successful I. C. S. graduates are numbered in the thousands and include presidents, production and research heads, superintendents, foremen in almost every branch of industry.

If you're truly curious, you'll want to know the details of what I. C. S. did for these men—and what it can do for you. The coupon brings you this full information. Mark and mail it *right now!*

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

ICS

BOX 3970-L, SCRANTON 9, PENNA.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full particulars about the course BEFORE which I have marked X:

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Air Conditioning and Plumbing Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Courses |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heating | <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Metallurgy | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Refrigeration | <input type="checkbox"/> Communications Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop | <input type="checkbox"/> Rayon Weaving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronics | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drilling | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telephony | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Woollen Manufacturing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold-Loss Work | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Analytical | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking—Wood, Metal | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet-Metal Drafting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Petroleum Refining | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet-Metal Worker | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plastics | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Ship Drafting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pulp and Paper Making | <input type="checkbox"/> Electrical Light and Power | <input type="checkbox"/> Tool Designing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Lighting Technicians | <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaking | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Electrician | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding—Gas and Electric | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Internal Combustion Engines Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Courses | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridges and Building Frames | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brakes | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel-Electric | <input type="checkbox"/> Car Inspector | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Courses | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Fireman | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Aeronautical Engineer's, Jr. | <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Section Foreman | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer | <input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engineering Courses | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Structural Blueprints | <input type="checkbox"/> Aircraft Forging | <input type="checkbox"/> Ballroom Making | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Combustion Engineering | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Steel Treatment of Metals | <input type="checkbox"/> Engine Building | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineering | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Traffic Management | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Business and Academic Courses | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Accounting | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Arithmetic | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Administration | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Correspondence | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Certified Public Accounting | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial Art | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Cost Accounting | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Federal Tax | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> First Year College | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Foremanship | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Good English | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Higher Mathematics | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Motor Traffic | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Salesmanship | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Lettering | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenography | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> French | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> High School | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Secretarial | |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Postal Service | |

Name _____ Home Address _____

City _____ State _____

Age _____ Present Position _____ Working Hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

Special tuition rates to members of the Armed Forces. Special discount to World War II Veterans.
Canadian residents send coupon to International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Ltd., Montreal, Canada.

POPULAR DETECTIVE

Vol. XXXV, No. 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

July, 1948

FEATURED COMPLETE NOVELET



Fish For Murder

by Wyatt Blassingame

A fiendish bomb plot blasted young Parker into a mystery that proved as dark as the grave which had just claimed the life of his own brother! 9

TWO OTHER COMPLETE NOVELETS

- HATFUL OF TROUBLE.....Roger Fuller 36
Moody Hackett came into the case looking for plenty of grief!
- A'HUNTING WE WILL GO.....Edward Churchill 58
Nick and Sue Burney didn't like their new roles as Nimrods!

SIX SHORT STORIES

- KLUMP A LA CARTE.....Joe Archibald 25
Willie washed Finnerty's dishes and then the fun really began
- ROLL THEM BONES.....Ken Lewis 51
Sometimes it doesn't pay to turn up as a grim, sinister ghost
- CATCH ME A KILLER.....Robert Sidney Bowen 75
When you try to pin a rap on Chet Lacey, it's time for trouble
- THE CLUE GOT LOST.....Ray Cummings 85
Sometimes important evidence turns up in some strange places
- STILL OF NIGHT.....Will Oursler 95
"Only the two of us were sitting there in silence, and then—"
- HAPPY DOOMSDAY TO YOU.....Robert Leslie Bellem 97
Lovely Lotus Wang uses her wiles to frame young Henry Soong
- AND
- OFFICIAL BUSINESS.....The Editor 6
A friendly department where our readers and the editor meet
- FORGING A CAREER.....Samuel Mines 91
The dramatic, true-life story of a world-famous swindler

POPULAR DETECTIVE, published every other month by Better Publications, Inc., at 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N.Y. N. L. Pines, President. Subscription (12 issues), \$1.80; single copies, \$1.15. Foreign and Censored postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter April 14, 1938, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Copyright, 1948, by Better Publications, Inc. In communicating with this magazine, please include your postal zone number, if any. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by self-addressed, stamped envelopes and are submitted at the author's risk. Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence. Printed in the U.S.A.

HOW MUCH HORROR CAN A MAN BEAR?

HOW often can Fate turn the tables to overwhelming evil, before a man cracks up? Six times, in "Six Times Death," William Irish subjects a human being to such sheer torment—in six haunting, horrifying stories. A collection of mystery and suspense stories that will hold you breathless!

Choose "Six Times Death"—or any other Popular Library reprint—and get \$2 worth of exciting reading or more, for *only 25c*. Entertain yourself for hours on hand, for a fraction of the cost of the original editions. Page for page, word for word, they're the same books that were originally published to sell for \$2.00 or more.

POPULAR LIBRARY MYSTERIES

- 137 SIX TIMES DEATH, by William Irish
- 120 THE SPIRAL STAIRCASE, by Ethel Lina White
- 121 A LOSING GAME, by Freeman Wills Crofts
- 112 THE BLACK SHROUDS,
by Constance & Gwenyth Little
- 126 THE DEADLY SUNSHADE, by Phoebe Atwood Taylor
- 124 DESIGN IN EVIL, by Rufus King
- 125 SAID THE SPIDER TO THE FLY, by Richard Shattuck
- 132 SEVEN KEYS TO BALDPATE, by Earl Derr Biggers
- 133 ADVANCE AGENT, by John August
- 130 THE MYSTERY COMPANION, edited by A. L. Furman



POPULAR LIBRARY *Specials*

- 150 CROSSWORD PUZZLES, *Book Two*
- 102 DUEL IN THE SUN, by Niven Busch
- 94 THE MORTAL STORM,
by Phyllis Bottome
- 91 THE SEA-HAWK, by Rafael Sabatini

Popular Library, Inc., Dept. TFG7
10 East 40th St., New York 16, N. Y.
Send me postpaid the Popular Library books I have circled. I enclose 25c (in coins or in U. S. stamps of small denominations) per copy. (NOTE: We pay postage on orders for 4 books or more. If ordering less than 4 books, please enclose 5c per book extra for postage.)

91	112	124	130	137
94	120	125	132	150
102	121	126	133	

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

CITY & ZONE.....STATE.....

ORDER BY
NUMBER

MAIL COUPON TODAY

Official Business

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS AND THE EDITOR MEET

I T was a long, dark cave and the man was hopelessly lost in it. "If I only had a clue to guide me," he murmured, "I could get out. I'll never find my way through this maze of passages and blind tunnels without a clue. I'll die here."

Of course you know that the "clue" the man is talking about is a ball of thread, and not the sort of clue we are always meeting up with in detective and mystery stories. The original meaning of the word clue (or clew) was a ball of thread or yarn, like the one in the mythological tale of Theseus and Ariadne where just such a ball of yarn guided Theseus out of the labyrinth on Crete where otherwise he would have perished.

Later, the idea of a thread leading somewhere began to have its modern, figurative meaning, which we find expressed in the detective story clue. And it's easy to see why a murder case can be compared with a cave—a long and dark cave at that, with misleading passages, routes that lead nowhere, false exits that seem meant only to confuse, and pitfalls and dangers threatening every foot of the way.

A murder case is just like that. And it's no wonder we speak so often of "tangled clues" and "unraveling clues" and "following clues," for the clue that leads the way out to light on a homicide is indeed like a miracle ball of thread!

There are plenty of baffling clues, of just the kind we've been talking about, in the powerful novel that heads the lineup in our next issue:

DEATH HALTS A HOLIDAY
by
EDWARD CHURCHILL

Nick Blade, hardboiled Hollywood de-

TECTIVE, had been called to a Nevada gambling town. But when he arrived there, he found that the man who had sent for him—Merle Davis—was leaving by plane for Europe the next day. Why would Merle want to hire a private dick the night before he took off for Europe?

The Golden Dog

Merle Davis' pretty wife didn't know what it was all about.

"Merle's not talking," she said to Nick Blade when he called at the Davis home. "He hasn't talked to me, the way he used to, since he got back from overseas. We're strangers. Take, for instance, the dog."

"Dog?"

"A golden dog. A gimmick which he wears hanging on his watch chain. He never takes it off when he's up and around. When he goes to bed at night he puts it—and a gun—under his pillow."

With Merle's wife, Nick Blade drove to the gambling casino where Merle dealt for the house. There he soon got a look at Gambler Merle and at the golden dog, suspended on a thin gold chain on his vest front. What did Nick think of Merle?

These are his words:

"I sized the guy up in one word—predatory. That went for anything he could lay his hands on, including women. He had a male chin that jutted belligerently, a wide mouth with thin, acquisitive lips, and a rather long nose with a ridge that seemed to be pushed up by hard, gray eyes that were a bit too close together. His eyebrows were thin, long over his eyes, which smoldered with worry or some other deep-down conflict. His skin was pulled tight over his cheekbones."

Then, abruptly, the lights went out. A woman screamed, some men shouted, but before anything like panic could spread among the crowd, the lights came on again. Nick Blade was the first to see what had happened. Merle Davis was toppling from his place at the table to the floor, and a knife handle, smooth and silver, was sticking out of his back.

Nick was beside the body then. The knife was in to the hilt, just in the right place to get the heart. He put his hand to Merle's right shoulder and started to pull the weapon free. He saw what was left of Merle's watch chain then.

The golden dog was gone!

That's the sort of fast action and excitement you'll find in **DEATH HALTS A HOLIDAY**, by Edward Churchill. It's a real story of incredible suspense and baffling clues—that lead Nick Blade from one jam into another. Hounded by the law, fleeing for his own life, Nick has to piece together the clues of this strange murder while on the jump, and with each jump threatening to be his last!

Also in the next issue, a smashing crime novelet:

BLACK SHEEP KILL by DALE CLARK

It was supposed to be a swell show. Harry Wayne had paid a scalper twenty-five bucks for two tickets. But when he dashed up the flight of stairs to Marian Grady's apartment, she told him—she couldn't go!

Marian had a beautiful face. Her figure was okay, too; tall, leggy, and yet well-rounded. He'd never seen *how* well rounded before, for this was the first time he'd seen her in an evening dress.

It stung and hurt Harry to think Marian was sidestepping him in favor of Dr. John Spiker, her boss. Maybe it was because Harry was a little suspicious, too, that he insisted on driving Marian to where Dr. Spiker had asked her to come.

It was in the middle of a dark block that Marian insisted on leaving Harry. He didn't like it. It was plain something was wrong. It showed in Marian's face and in her very action. He saw her

(Continued on page 111)

Learn ELECTRICITY OR RADIO IN THE GREAT SHOPS OF COYNE

Your Choice of TWO GREAT FIELDS

Learn Quickly!

Prepare for the future with ALL-AROUND TRAINING. Come to the SHOPS OF COYNE in Chicago, the school with 49 years of training experience. Two big opportunity fields. Thousands of graduates in industry.

ELECTRICITY

INCLUDING INDUSTRIAL ELECTRONICS

Big future in Power Plant Work, Motors, Armature Winding, Home and Factory Wiring, Appliances, Refrigeration, Maintenance, Illumination, etc. Electricians are in demand everywhere—lifetime job service. Many earn while learning. Send for **FREE BOOK ON COYNE Training.**



RADIO-Television

A great field now, even greater growth ahead. Here at COYNE you're trained for Construction, Testing, Trouble-Shooting on Radio, Public Address, Sound Picture Units, Training includes FM, Photo-cells, Television, etc. Many Coyne Trained men own well-paying radio businesses of their own.



Not a "Home-Study" Course!

You get actual shop work on full-size equipment plus necessary theory. Whether you had previous experience or not makes no difference at Coyne.

NON-VETERANS WHO ARE SHORT OF MONEY can finance most of their tuition and pay it in easy monthly payments after graduation.

Electric Refrigeration

This training means additional opportunities. Training in this field now added to our Electrical or Radio course.

MAIL COUPON FOR FACTS!

See how we make it EASY for you to get ready NOW. Check course you prefer and rush to us for full details, FREE. No obligation—no salesman will call. Do it TODAY.

Approved for G. I. Training

R. W. COOKE, President
COYNE ELECTRICAL and RADIO SCHOOL
Dept. 88-MK,
500 S. Paulina St., Chicago 12, Ill.

Send me your **BIG FREE BOOK**—for the course checked below. Also full details of your Student Finance Plan.

☐ **ELECTRICITY**

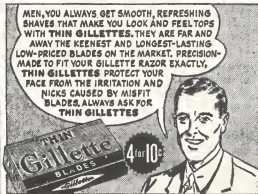
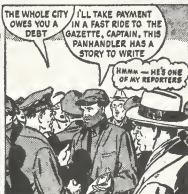
☐ **RADIO**

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY..... STATE.....

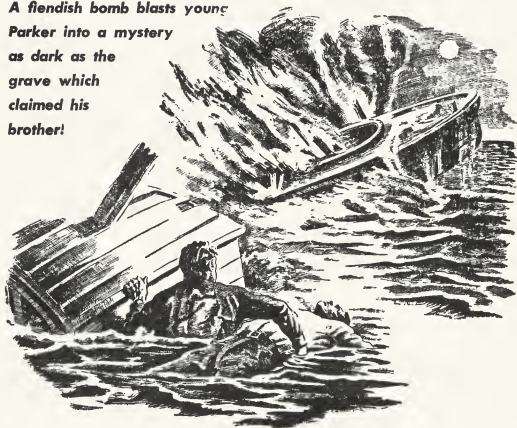
TRUTH PROVED STRANGER THAN FICTION WHEN...



a novelet by

WYATT BLASSINGAME

A fiendish bomb blasts young Parker into a mystery as dark as the grave which claimed his brother!



FISH for MURDER

CHAPTER I

Trouble at Sea

SAM PARKER stood on the rickety wharf and nodded proudly toward the fishing launch.

"There she is," he said. "All mine!"

His brother, Ed Parker, smiled. "Your—and Dean Doulton's."

"Mine," Sam Parker said. "Doulton got his last payment two months ago. She's mine—all mine."

"Your luck's good," Ed Parker said.

"Mighty good. The fish running my way, and Mary too." He laughed. He was a big, blond, blue-eyed man, barefooted, without a shirt, his skin burned to deep leather-brown. "It would make Mary mad as the devil to hear me put it that way. She doesn't care for fishing, you know. But I've finally talked her around. We'll be married next month."

"That's swell," Ed Parker said, and

hoped he sounded as though he meant it.

He remembered Mary Wilkins. Personally, he had never thought much of her, but his brother had been in love with her since they had been kids.

"I wish I could stay down for the wedding," he said.

"I wish you could."

They went back down the wharf, Ed Parker looking incongruous and uncomfortable in his dark suit, his dark felt hat. He was as tall as his brother, but dark instead of blond, lean instead of heavy. Only their eyes were alike, a bright, clear blue.

"In fact," Sam Parker was saying, "my luck has had to be good. I wouldn't be here otherwise."

"What do you mean?"

"A couple of times recently I've missed bad luck by a whisker. I was working on my boat, tied right up where she is now, and stuck my head over the cabin. A bullet missed me by about an inch."

"A bullet?" Ed Parker asked.

"Don't get excited," his brother said. "It was Jim Farwell's twins doing some target practice with a .22 they'd got for their birthday. They claimed it wasn't them, of course, but I'd heard them shooting."

"A .22 can kill just like a .44," Ed Parker said.

"Not when it misses. The other thing—last week my boat caught fire out on the grouper banks. Luck was with me. I'd gone into the cabin and happened to see the fire almost the instant it started. Otherwise—" He shrugged. "Strange thing about it, my fire extinguisher didn't work. I'd had it filled just a few weeks before, but it was empty. It must have got upset somehow."

PALMS lined the narrow street. The Florida sunlight was white and hot upon them. In half the yards fishnets were hung to dry, looking like huge spiderwebs.

"How did the boat happen to catch fire?" Ed Parker asked.

"I can't be sure. I found some old rags around the engine, and an oil leak. Tom Lacy told me he hadn't left the rags there, and I'm sure I didn't. Or at least I don't remember doing it."

Ed Parker thought of the launch he

had seen, an old launch, but bright with new paint, and clean. He thought of his brother's pride in it. It wasn't likely he'd leave old rags around, or have an oil leak for long without knowing it.

"Both these things have happened in the last month?" he asked.

"Yes," Sam said. He saw the frown on his brother's face and laughed. "Don't get worked up just because you're a detective these days. They were accidents."

"You're sure?"

"Who would want to kill me?"

"That's what I was wondering," Ed Parker said. "Who would make any profit out of it? Who would the boat go to?"

"Mary," Sam said, grinning. "With my insurance and the house Dad left. But Mary's going to get it all anyway when we are married next month."

"You've already signed it over to her?"

"Sure. Does it scare you?" Sam slapped his brother on the back. "I think you're just trying to get out of going with me tomorrow. You never were much of a fisherman."

"Oh, no?" Ed Parker said.

He remembered his childhood here in the little fishing village of Cortez. He and Sam had been raised around the water, working with their father who had never owned a boat of his own, hauling mullet nets in the fierce baking heat of summer and the wet cold of winter. He remembered the time a stingray had lashed him in the calf of the leg, the long days on the grouper banks and the sudden squalls that could sink a boat without trace. Then the war, and Ed Parker had been in the M. P.'s, with so good a record that after the war there was the offer of a job with a private detective agency. He had never loved fishing the way Sam had loved it. The work had been too hard and bitter with too little profit. But there had been a lot of fun too, he thought now.

"The devil!" he said. "I can outfish you any day of the week."

"We'll see tomorrow." Then they turned into the cottage where Sam lived alone now, where their father and mother had died, Sam added, "I wish we were going alone. It would be fun. But I've given Tom Lacy a regular job.



Travers was three feet from Ed now, crouched like a cat

He's the only man working with me regularly."

"Who is he? You sound as though you don't like him."

"I don't," Sam said. "He's a newcomer here and is sort of peculiar." He shrugged. "But he's a good fisherman."

THE world was a pale, pre-dawn green when they left the dock the next morning. Pelicans and niggerducks passed in long, low-flying lines. The gulls wheeled and cried.

"We'll go out the south pass," Tom Lacy said.

Ed Parker looked at him. Lacy was a big man, as big as Sam and as blond, and he carried himself with an arrogance that was annoying.

"Are you the skipper?" Ed Parker said.

They faced one another. Lucy was smiling a little, and it might have been a friendly, easy smile, yet there was a faint hint of contempt in it.

He said, "You're the fisherman that turned detective, aren't you?"

"When I was fishing," Ed said, "it was the skipper who gave the orders."

Sam Parker broke up what might have been a quarrel.

"Want to take the wheel, Ed?" he said. "See if you remember the pass."

The grouper banks lay about thirty miles south and west. The gulf rolled in long slow swells and once the rocks were located the boat was anchored and the men began fishing with handlines, hauling the big, flopping fish up from the bottom like buckets of water from a well. The sun burned down and the water sparkled. Ed Parker found that he was growing weary before the day was half over.

By nightfall they had four hundred pounds aboard, iced down. They ate supper, the boat a small rolling dot on the darkling water. A half moon rode the sky.

"It's been a long time since I spent a night out here," Ed Parker said. "I think I'll take a blanket and sleep on top the cabin."

"You're sure you won't roll off?" Lacy asked.

"If I do, I'll call you to save me."

There had been no trouble between the two, but always a slight edge of friction. Ed could understand why his

brother didn't like the man. He was just a little too conceited, a little too ready with giving orders. And yet Lacy knew what he was about, Ed Parker thought, lying on the cabin top, the stars pale and swaying above him. Lacy seemed extremely competent—not the sort of man you'd want to fight with. In fact, there was something vaguely familiar about him. He reminded Ed of somebody. But Ed was tired and couldn't think of who it was. With the sound of water slapping against the boat, sleep came on him.

He was lifted, flung into the air with flame bright around him. It was a dream—he was back in London and a V-2 had crashed into the next block and all the windows were shattering and the ceiling falling and the place already afire.

Then the water closed over him and he was fighting his way back to the surface again. There was a red haze of flame against sky and water. The water was in his eyes and the fire was in his eyes and nothing was clear. He saw a blur that might have been the launch, only with no cabin now, shattered and burning. Little trills of fire ran out on the water, ran down into the trough of waves.

He was swimming without conscious movement, his mind still blurred. Something black loomed in front of him. His hand struck it, and it was solid. It was part of the cabin, blown clear of the launch. He climbed on to it.

His mind was clearing a little now. He stared wildly around him—the dark rolling water, the stars, the moon that was a blob on the horizon.

"Sam!" he called. "Sam! Where are you?"

There was an answer, wordless against the sound of the water, without direction.

"Sam!" he shouted. "Sam!"

"Here! I'm—hurt. . . ."

He was off the raft then, swimming again, calling. The voice called to him again, and he turned toward it.

"I'm—burned. I'm—hurt," Sam Parker said. He was only a blur against the sheen of the water.

"Take it easy! There's a raft over here, part of the cabin. I'll get you to it."

He started swimming, pulling Sam after him. But he was no longer certain

of directions. A wild terror came over him. He had lost the raft! He would never find it again!

Then it loomed up ahead of him and somehow he had Sam on it and was crouching beside him.

"I—hurt. . . ." Sam said. "Fire. . . ." His voice drained off.

Ed Parker huddled there beside his brother, listening to the sobbed, racked breathing.

"I—hurt!" Sam said, and his voice was thin with agony. "Stop it, Ed! Stop it from hurting!"

"I'll stop it," Ed said. And there was nothing he could do, no way he could help.

Time and again Ed called Tom Lacy's name, but there was never an answer from the other man. Probably he had gone down with the launch, Ed thought. So there was nothing he could do except kneel here beside his brother and listen to him cry out in pain.

The sun came up. The sun was a white glare on the empty gulf. Sam Parker died when the sun was two hours high in the sky.

CHAPTER II

Fear



IT WAS noon of the second day when a fishing boat out of Cortez found Ed Parker. He was only partially conscious then, clinging to the raft and and to the body of his brother. The fishermen got him aboard their launch and made him as comfortable as possible,

heading back for the mainland under full throttle. And tossing on his cot, Ed Parker kept muttering about murder.

"They killed him. They killed him," he whispered.

The fishermen stood at the cabin door and watched, their faces gone pale.

The launch tied up at the dock and fishhouse which belonged to Dean Doulton. Parker, reeling out of the launch's cabin, saw Doulton sitting in front of the fishhouse, reading a magazine. Doulton was the first person he recognized—he

hadn't known the fishermen who rescued him—and now he began to babble again, trying to climb on the dock.

"Wait a minute!" the fishermen said. "Wait! You're hurt. We'll help you."

He was on the dock then, staggering toward Doulton. "Somebody murdered Sam!" he said. "Murdered him. Who was it? Who was it, Dean?"

Doulton was a good looking man about Parker's age. He was not fat, but a little soft looking, his face pale and fresh. Now he looked up from his magazine and his eyes grew startled, his mouth slack.

"Ed! What—what's happened?"

Ed Parker stood over him, swaying. "Somebody killed Sam. Murdered him. Killed Tom Lacy too. Who did it, Dean? Who would kill Sam?"

"What do you mean—who?"

The fishermen were around them then. "You've got to get to a doctor, fellow. Come on. We'll take care of everything."

They began to lead him toward a car. Ed Parker made one last effort to throw them off, looking toward Doulton.

"Who would have done it, Dean? Who wanted to kill Sam?"

Doulton's face was still blank with surprise. "I don't know," he said.

They put Ed Parker in a car then and drove him to Bradenton, to the hospital.

Two days later, Parker was sitting on the side of his bed, fully dressed, and Dean Doulton was saying, "I brought your car in, as you asked me to."

"Thanks," Parker said.

The skin on his face and hands was still puffed and red from sunburn, but healing now. The blue eyes were deep sunk in their sockets, the sunburned lips tight across his teeth. But his hands, when he lighted a cigarette, were steady enough.

"I wanted to talk with you, Dean," he went on. "You've lived out there all your life, known Sam all your life. Who would want to kill him?"

"Nobody." He said it without hesitation, looking straight at Parker. "Are you sure the engine didn't catch fire, the gas tank explode? Or you could have hit a mine. German subs spread them around here during the war. One is found every now and then."

"No," Ed said. He told Doulton of the two near accidents which had happened

to Sam. "That's stretching coincidence too far. This was murder."

Dean Doulton shook his head. "I can't agree," he said. "I can't believe it."

PARKER stood up and went to the window. He blew smoke against the screen and watched it seep through into the bright sunlight, whip away with the wind.

"Maybe I'm a little touched in the head," he said, "a little crazy—because there's no proof. And everybody has laughed at me when I said it was murder. But I still believe it. I'm going to find out."

"How?"

"I had hoped you could tell me. Sam said you were in on everything in the town now."

"Not everything." When Doulton smiled he looked much younger than Parker. "Boats and fishing and a little real estate. I never liked to fish because the work was too hard. I'd rather sit in the shade and read. Remember?"

"I remember," Ed Parker said. "Sam told me you'd made a lot of money for a small town."

"I've been lucky."

"Did Sam owe you money?"

"Not since he paid off the boat. I don't think he owed anything to anybody."

They looked at one another. After a moment Ed Parker said, "What about Mary Wilkins?"

"You know her. I don't reckon she's changed much."

Their eyes held. Ed Parker said, "And Mike Travers?"

"He's as crazy about her as he ever was. And he hates work just as bad. He's been growing a little bitter of late about not getting rich or even earning a living. It don't look like he ever will. Maybe that's the reason Mary made up her mind to marry Sam."

"I see," Ed Parker said. "And that's all the help you can give me?"

"That's all. Except that—I think you are wrong, Ed. I think it was an accident."

"I'm going to find out."

"I can wish you luck, that's all." But at the door he stopped, his hand on the knob. His pale face looked even paler than usual. After a moment he said, "Are you sure Tom Lacy was killed in that explosion?"

"He must have been. Why?"

"I don't know why I asked, except—he was a strange man."

Doulton went out then, leaving Ed Parker standing by the window. Parker finished his cigarette and put it out carefully. He went out, spoke to the nurse at the front desk. His bill was paid, and he went on out into the hot sunshine. He found his car and drove slowly toward Cortez.

Maybe he was a little crazy, he thought. Watching his brother die in agony, then the long hours on the raft, clinging to it and to his brother's body, that had been enough to cause a man's mind to crack. It was during those hours that he had become so deadly sure that what had happened was no accident. But now, riding along the pleasant streets with the moss-hung oaks and the hibiscus blooming in the yards, it all seemed unreal and far away. Perhaps it had been an accident, as everyone thought. Certainly the police had put no faith in his claim of murder. And those other things, the bullet which just missed Sam's head and the fire in his boat, they could have been accidents too.

But I've got to know, he thought. *I've got to know.* Until he did know, the fire-lit and horrible memory would haunt his mind.

HE parked in front of the little house where Sam had lived, where he himself had lived as a boy. The yard was small, but well kept. The cottage was newly painted. Sam had kept everything clean and bright. He had wanted it all nice for the wedding which would never take place now. Ed Parker went up the steps and opened the front door and went inside.

The girl was sitting on the sofa, facing him. She had red hair and her make-up was so skillfully applied that it hardly seemed to be makeup. Her eyes were large and blue-green. She was pretty, but there was something strained and frightened about her face.

She stood up. "You're Ed Parker?"

"Yes."

"I'm Mrs. Lacy. Mrs. Tom Lacy. I've been waiting for you to come home."

"Oh," Ed said. It was all he could think of for a moment. Until now it hadn't occurred to him that Tom Lacy might have a wife. He hadn't thought

of anyone's sorrow but his own. He said, "Sit down, Mrs. Lacy."

Feeling a bit awkward he took a cigarette out of his pocket and offered her one. She took it without glancing at it. *She doesn't even know she's holding it*, he thought.

"Tell me what happened out there," she said. "I've got to know."

"You saw the papers?"

"Yes. But I want you to tell me."

He told her as well as he could remember. "I never saw your husband after it happened. He must have gone down with the launch." He added, his voice tight in his throat, "It was better that way."

"But you don't know that he died?"

She was afraid, he thought. And he had a strange feeling that she was afraid her husband had not died.

"People say that you think it wasn't an accident," she said.

"I may be wrong."

"But you think it was planned?"

He told her of the shot which had missed Sam Parker, the fire in his boat. And as he talked it seemed to him that the girl's tension increased, that the fear came closer to the surface of her eyes.

"Do you know who it might have been?" Ed Parker said. "Who could have wanted to kill Sam?"

"Nobody could want to kill Sam. Everybody liked him." She put out her cigarette and stood up. "Perhaps it was an accident," she said, and her voice was like a prayer. "Perhaps it was an accident."

She went out and it was only when she was gone that Ed Parker noticed the faint odor of perfume in the room. The room seemed very quiet and lonely.

CHAPTER III

Knife Fight



HE MOVED restlessly about the house. But he couldn't stay there doing nothing. And there was one point that he could clear up—or at least one place where he could look for an answer. That was the matter of the shot which had just missed Sam.

The Farwell twins were eleven years old. Ed found them on the dock with a minnow net, casting for bait. They wore dungarees and nothing else.

"Hello, Mr. Ed," they said.

"Hello," Ed said. "Let me see if I can still throw a net." With the lead in his mouth for a third cast he said, "You boys haven't given up target practice with your .22 since you just missed Sam, have you?"

They stared at him. They were as alike as two pictures of the same person. "We didn't nearly hit him, Mr. Ed," one of them said.

"No?"

"We'd been shooting at an old float out on the bay, all right. But not near him. We never shot near him."

"He said a bullet just missed him."

"It musta been some other kid. The way it happened was like this. There was a big school of mullet come in close to the old dock and Mr. Mike Travers had called to tell us about it. We put the gun down and run over there with

[Turn Page]

HEADACHE

UPSET
STOMACH

JUMPY
NERVES



RELIEF!

THANKS TO FAMOUS
BROMO-SELTZER

Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Company since 1887.



our net. While we was there we heard somebody shoot the gun, but we didn't pay no attention to it. That musta been the shot that almost hit Mr. Sam."

Ed Parker tried to keep his voice steady, casual. "You don't know who fired it?"

"No, sir. It was around that point. We couldn't see for the mangroves."

"Was Mike Travers with you when you heard the shot?"

"No, sir. He told us about the mullet, but then he went off. We didn't see him no more."

"Thanks," Ed said. His hands were trembling, and he put them in his pocket.

"We told Mr. Sam," one of the twins said. "But he didn't act like he believed us. He just said for us to be more careful, and went off."

"That's okay," Ed said. He took his hands out of his pockets. They weren't trembling now. They were very very steady. "I believe you," he said.

It was late twilight when he reached Mary Wilkins' house. He stood outside in the deepening shadows, the palms making a faint rattling in the breeze, and looked at it. It was the biggest house in this little fishing village, and Mary's father had been well-to-do, according to Cortez' standards. He had spoiled his daughter and left her with an exaggerated sense of her own worth and beauty. She had fancied herself as too good for the local fishermen, with the result that most of them had quickly decided to-the-devil-with-her. But Sam Parker had loved her since he was child, and so had Mike Travers.

Now she was to inherit Sam's boat and his house and the ten thousand dollars insurance he had brought out of the navy.

Ed went slowly up the walk. A moon-vine shaded the porch, its flowers just beginning to open for the night. The porch itself was shadowed and dark, but a light burned in the front room. Parker raised his hand to knock and stopped, motionless, his hand still raised.

MARY WILKINS was sitting where the light of the lamp shown down upon her face. It was a beautiful face, framed in blonde hair and with a full, lush mouth, but there was something a little savage about it now as she looked

up at Mike Travers.

"Did you kill him for me?" she said. Through the open window her voice was clear and cold. "Did you kill him?"

Travers stood leaning over her. His face was flushed, his eyes red in the light of the lamp.

He's drunk, Ed Parker thought. Travers' hair fell uncombed over his forehead and the faint line of an old scar showed across his chin.

"What difference does it make?" he asked. "He's dead, and I'm not sorry."

"Did you kill him?" the girl said again, almost in a whisper, almost with contempt, it seemed.

He swung away, went half across the room and came back. "What difference does it make whether I did it or not? He's dead."

She stood up, close to him, looking up at him. "You didn't have the nerve," she said. "Not you. You get drunk and talk, but you didn't have the nerve."

"Didn't I?" It was almost a scream.

He caught the girl by her shoulders, shook her once, and then, somehow, his arms were around her, crushing her against him, his mouth hard down on hers.

But even as he kissed her, her face was in the light. It was a face savage and cold—the face of a woman capable of anything. She neither withdrew from the kiss nor gave anything to it, standing utterly motionless.

Travers released her as suddenly as he had caught her to him. His face was bloodless, his eyes wild. "Blast you!" he said huskily. "You—you witch!"

He spun away from her and started for the door. As he reached out for it, Ed Parker opened it from the outside and stepped in.

"Hello," Ed Parker said.

The tableau held for long seconds—the two men close together at the doorway, almost touching one another, and beyond them, the woman in the circle of light. Parker reached back and closed the door behind him.

"I've been standing on the porch," he said. "I found the conversation very interesting."

Mike Travers' breathing became audible. His eyes were red-veined and half crazy with fear and liquor. Beyond him, the girl moved finally, with self-conscious calmness. She lit a cigarette,

puffed the smoke into a veil before her face.

She said, "Hello, Eddie. It's a long time since I saw you."

"Yes," Ed Parker said, but he was looking at Travers. "So you wanted Sam killed," he said. "You wanted him killed. And you didn't have the nerve."

He moved then. Without knowing he was going to, without volition, he took a half step forward and smashed his fist against Travers' jaw. The man stumbled backward, hit a chair, and went over with a crash.

Travers screamed. It wasn't a loud sound, but deep in his throat and crazy. He was on his feet and there was a long knife in his hand and his eyes were wild. The old scar glowed dully across his chin.

"I'll show you who has the nerve," he whispered.

He came forward. The knife was held low, the point aimed at Ed Parker's middle. Light ran in cold shivers along the blade. Parker went back one step, another. Then the wall was behind him and he could go no farther.

"I'll show you," Travers said again in that half whisper.

He knew how to use a knife. He had killed a man once in a drunken brawl. These things went through Parker's mind as he watched the knife. The muscles of his stomach were contracted and cold and his heart ached. In some back corner of his mind he thought, *A knife is more frightening than a gun.*

TRAVERS was three feet away now, crouched like a cat. He moved the knife to one side.

Parker struck with his left hand. Travers ducked and leaped under it, driving the knife at Parker.

It was timing. It had to be perfect. Parker's right hand closed on Travers' wrist, his body turned, twisting—the old judo that he had learned with the M.P.'s. And Travers was spinning over his shoulders, the knife wrenched from his hand, his body crashing down hard on the floor. Then Ed Parker was holding the knife. His breathing was ragged and his throat hurt.

"Maybe a home-made time bomb, or an oil leak to explode an engine—something when you are nowhere around—is more in your class," Ed Parker

said sarcastically.

Travers got slowly to his feet. A trickle of blood came from his mouth, across the old scar on his chin. He looked at Parker, then at the girl. And when he looked at Mary she laughed in his face.

A change came over Mike Travers then. The drunken fury went out of his face and something very cold and deadly took its place. Without a word, he turned and left the house, closing the door softly behind him.

When he was gone, Mary Wilkins said, "I never saw him act that way before."

Parker said nothing. The muscles of his throat were still tight.

"You know," Mary Wilkins, "Mike may be more dangerous than I thought."

"Yes," Parker said.

She sat down and crossed her legs, looking at him through the smoke of her cigarette. "I'm wondering what kind of an act I should put on for you, Eddie."

"Just remember I saw the act with Mike before I came in."

"That's what makes it difficult." The full, lush mouth turned up in a smile, but her eyes were yellow-green and deliberate. "After all, we were almost brother and sister."

"Were we?"

"I expected to marry Sam." She said it slowly, looking at him. "I didn't love him, if that's what you want. But I didn't see anything better hereabouts. Anything that was available."

"Why not Dean Doulton? It was money you wanted."

"Dean has never cared much for me. Perhaps we are too much alike. Besides, he's got his eye on Anne Lacy."

"Who?"

"Tom Lacy's wife, or girl friend. Whatever she was. I've always had my doubts about them being married."

"You still speak well of everyone, don't you?"

"Only the best, Eddie. And while I'm doing it, have you thought about Dean? He's accustomed to getting the things he wants around here. I'm pretty sure he wanted Anne Lacy. And I know very well he wanted to hold onto all the things he has."

"Meaning?" Parker said.

"Tom Lacy is—was quite a man. He

had a lot of ambition. He has been around and he meant to keep going. He liked to acquire things."

"You sound as though you knew him pretty well."

"I did, Eddie. I did." She was smiling, but the smile faded after a moment and her face was serious. "Was Tom aboard when the explosion happened? Was he really killed?"

He stared at her, thinking. *She's the third person to ask that question—Dean, and Mrs. Lacy, and now Mary.*

He said, "I think he was. Why?"

"It just seems odd," she said.

CHAPTER IV

Blood



HE ILLUMINATED dial of his watch showed 3:30. Ed Parker looked at it and wondered what it was that had awakened him. There was no sound except the faint whimper of wind about the house, the dim rattle of palm fronds outside his window. They

sounded like mice in the attic, he thought sleepily as he rolled over and made himself comfortable on the pillow.

And then he heard it again, a soft scraping noise that came from outside and close against his house. Something scratched against the house, against the window in the next room.

Someone was trying to get into the house.

He got quietly out of bed. The room was dark, but there was moonlight against the windows. It filtered in and made objects show as a deeper darkness against the night. Parker moved swiftly, quietly across the room, found the dresser, felt down to the second drawer and opened it. He began to feel inside for the gun. It was not his gun—he had not brought one on his vacation—but a gun Sam had brought back from the navy, and Ed Parker had seen it here the day before they went fishing.

He heard the window in the next room slide softly open. As it did, his hands were moving about the drawer, pushing the clothes aside, feeling under

them. The gun was not there!

He stood frozen for an instant. Sam hadn't taken the gun when they went fishing.

The gun had been right here in this drawer, and now it was gone.

The sound came faintly from the window in the next room. Ed Parker felt over the top of the dresser. There was a big waterbottle here. He took it by the neck, moved barefooted across the floor. Then, with his hand on the door between the rooms, there came the sudden sharp noise of someone knocking at the front door.

Parker hesitated, half turned. Then he pushed open the door into the next room and stepped through. The window showed dimly and empty. But it was open, and it had been closed when he went to bed. He stooped and looked outside.

Half a block away he saw a man, running hard. There was only a glimpse, and by moonlight he couldn't be certain. But there was something familiar about the man's outline and the way he ran. *Mike Travers*, he thought.

At the front door the knocking started again. It was not loud, but hurried and impatient. It sounded as though the person knocking might be frightened, but he knew that was only imagination. You couldn't tell a thing like that from the sound of a knock.

He went back through the house. In the front room he turned on a floorlamp, pulled open the door.

Anne Lacy stepped quickly inside. She pulled the door from Parker's hand, closed it behind her. She was breathing hard and her face was pale.

"I—I had to see you!"

"Come in." He gestured toward a chair and, as he did so, realized he was still carrying the water bottle. He put it on a table, a little self-conscious standing there in his pajama trousers and no top.

"I had to talk to you," Anne Lacy said again. She sat in the chair with her hands clasped in her lap as though to keep them from trembling. "It's about—what happened to your brother."

Ed Parker stood very still. Outside he could hear the faint clash of palm-fronds.

"Do you know who killed him?"

"Yes." She was looking down at her

hands. "Only it wasn't the way you think." She was quiet for a long while then, sitting there looking down at her hands. In the light of the lamp her hair was a burnished red. "There is no profit in swapping murderers," she said.

Still he waited. She was going to have to tell it in her own way, he thought, and after awhile she looked up at him.

"I wanted to be an actress," she said. "I expect half the girls in America do, but I didn't know it then. In the little town where I was raised, people said I was pretty enough to be in the movies. So I went to Hollywood. I never got on a lot."

Parker waited, watching her. She was very pretty, her eyes large and misty.

"It's not easy to earn a living out there," she said slowly. "And after awhile I met Tom. He had plenty of money. I didn't know how he got it. It didn't seem to matter."

"How did he get it?" Ed Parker asked.

The shot was outside the window. The sound of it seemed to shake the room. The girl rocked back in her chair, her lips parted and without sound. And Parker moved as instinctively as a man jumps for a foxhole at the whine of a falling bomb. He dived, struck the floorlamp with one outstretched hand and knocked it over. The light shattered and darkness poured into the room and Parker, rolling, came up against the wall.

THE echoes of the shot faded and there was only the stillness. Through it Parker moved on hands and knees. He found the front door and opened it. Outside, the moonlight shone on the palms and on the still, shadowed streets. At the end of the street he could see the bay and the shimmer of the moon upon it. There was nothing else.

He went back into the room. The bulb in the floorlamp was broken and he turned on the overhead light. The glare of the naked bulb was white and merciless. It showed the girl sitting there in the chair, her hands still folded, her eyes still open. The dark stain of blood spread slowly down her dress, spreading out from the hole below her left shoulder.

He did not need to touch her to know that she was dead.

It was dawn when the sheriff got there. Parker told him the story and saw the doubt in the man's eyes. Word ran swiftly about the village. Neighbors came and stood in the yard to look at the house. They came to the house and were turned away by the sheriff and deputies. And Parker told his story again, and the doubt was still in the sheriff's eyes. But there was no proof, one way or the other.

"I'll be here," Ed Parker said. "I won't be leaving the county."

"It will be best if you don't," the sheriff said.

"But I'm not under arrest?"

"No. Not yet."

"Then I'm driving into Bradenton," Ed Parker said.

He went out into morning sunlight that was like clear water. As he opened the door of his car, Dean Doulton came across the street.

"Wait a minute," Doulton said. His face, normally pale, was gray now. His eyes looked sunken, but there were red lights in them. He said, "Did you kill her, Ed? Did you?" Saliva flecked the corner of his mouth. His right hand was in his pocket and through the cloth Parker could see the outline of a gun. With his left hand he caught Parker's shirt. "Did you kill her?"

Parker took hold of Doulton's hand and pried it loose from his shirt. Only when the fingers came free did he say, "No. I didn't kill her."

"Who did?"

"I don't know."

There was no doubting the man's grief. *I didn't think he cared about anything but himself*, Parker thought *But he was in love with her.*

He said, "She had come to tell me who killed Sam. She never had the chance to do it."

"She never had a chance at so many things. Happiness . . ."

"Was she in love with you?"

Doulton raised his eyes. "I don't know," he said. "She wasn't in love with Tom Lacy. But she was loyal to him. When he disappeared, I thought—I'm sure that in a little while I could have made her love me. And there was no chance for that either."

He saw the way Parker was looking

at him and his smile was faint and bitter.

"No," he said. "I didn't kill Tom. But I didn't hold any grudge against the person who did." The smile changed and was horrible on his face. "Now," he said, "it's different."

EARL STUMPF, city editor of the Bradenton *Herald*, was a lean, gray-ing man. He sat behind a desk littered with papers and pencils and scissors and pastepots. He wore his shirt open at the throat and a handkerchief tied around his neck.

He said, "Hello, Ed."

"I need some help, Mr. Stumpf."

"Well, I don't know if I can give it to you. But I can try."

Parker described the man Tom Lacy, his physical appearance and the impression he made on people.

"He's been mixed up in some dirty work in the past, murder and maybe robbery and more. I think his name is really Tom, though I doubt the Lacy part. At one time he was in Hollywood, but what he did I don't know."

Stumpf searched through a mind as cluttered with the details of fifty years newspaper work as his desk was cluttered with tools of his trade. But he could find things there he wanted even as he could on his desk. He thought and rubbed a hand around the back of his neck.

"Let's take a look at the files," he said after a while.

When Parker left the newspaper he knew that Tom Lacy's real name had been Tom Hanna. He was wanted for murder and armed robbery. Four months ago he had knocked over a bank in Kansas and got away with sixty-two thousand dollars in cash. Since then he had been hot as a tin roof in summer and had completely disappeared.

Ed Parker thought these things over as he drove back toward Cortez, and little bits of the puzzle began to fall into place. There was no proof. Perhaps there never would be proof. He thought of his brother, burned and dying, of the way he had cried out in pain. And Ed Parker's face got drawn and ugly.

Two miles from Cortez an automobile drove out of a sideroad and blocked his way. He slammed on his brakes, skidded, and almost went into the ditch

Mary Wilkins got out of the other car and came toward him. She was wearing a white dress and it fitted smoothly over her curves. Her blonde hair was shoulder length and pretty in the sun.

"I was waiting for you, Eddie," she said.

She was beautiful, but she didn't look beautiful to Ed Parker.

"What is it?" he asked her.

"You don't need to be nasty, yet. I thought I'd tell you they found the gun."

"Gun? What gun?"

"The gun that killed Anne Lacy. It was hidden under your house. It was Sam's pistol."

He stared at her, and his mind seemed dazed for a moment.

"The sheriff is waiting for you," she went on. "He's going to charge you with murder."

He sat there and looked at her and past her across the flat, sun-washed country. The puzzle was almost complete now. He was fairly sure he knew who had killed his brother and who had killed Anne Lacy. But he had no proof. It was, perhaps, impossible ever to get proof. And, meanwhile, the sheriff waited to charge him with murder. The sheriff had the gun, and it would have Parker's fingerprints on it—he had handled it the other day, talking to Sam about it. And the girl had been killed in his home, at three-thirty in the morning, when he was alone with her. Any one of a number of motives might be claimed.

And the real killer would go free—the person who had murdered Sam with cold-blooded and almost unholy casualness, would continue free.

"Well," Mary Wilkins said. "We can't park here all day. We are blocking the road."

"I've got to have a chance to think."

"Park your car behind those palmettos. Then come on with me."

He left his car hidden from the highway by the palmettos and came back to Mary Wilkins.

"Sit on the floor in the back," she said.

"It may be a bit crowded but nobody will see you."

"Where are we going?"

"Home. Nobody will look for you there."

Mary Wilkins' garage joined the house. She drove in, closed the ga-

rage doors and Parker got out, feeling a little stiff. They went into the house.

"We'd better go up to the second floor," Mary said then. "Someone might see you here."

He followed her up to a big, airy bedroom and Mary sat on the bed.

"A little unconventional," she said. "But then the whole thing is, isn't it?"

He stood looking down at her. "Why did you warn me? Why bring me here?"

"I like you, Eddie." She made a show of being casual. "And you didn't kill her, did you?"

"I didn't."

"That's fine. I knew that if you had killed her it was because she killed Sam." After a moment she added, "And Tom Lacy."

"Do you know Tom Lacy's real name?"

"Wasn't it Lacy?"

"It was Tom Hanna. Wanted for murder and bank robbery."

"Well I'll be hanged!" She said it softly, biting at her lips.

"You didn't know?"

"I—" Downstairs the phone rang. "I'll be back in a moment," she said.

CHAPTER V

Swapping Killers



ED PARKER could not hear the conversation, but shortly Mary called that she was going out for a while. It was midafternoon when she came back.

"There's no doubt that Tom Lacy was killed in the accident," she said. "His body has just been found."

Parker looked at her as though what she had said had no particular meaning to him. His face was haggard. There had been no chance to shave that morning and the beard was dark on his cheeks and jaw.

"Does Dean Doulton live out there at the end of the dock now?" he asked.

"In luxury. He's quite a sybarite, these days. In a small way, of course."

"Will he be there tonight?"

She looked at him out of yellow-green eyes. "I could arrange for him to be."

"And Mike Travers?"

"I can arrange for that poor fool to be anywhere. What are you planning?"

"I want you along too," Ed Parker said. "You'll see."

The rain started about twilight and by ten o'clock it was blowing a near gale. Mary Wilkins put on a transparent raincoat of light blue with a hood and this blue frame to her face made her eyes look more yellow and catlike than ever.

"I'm afraid I don't have a raincoat big enough to fit you," she told Parker.

"I don't need one." His shirt was open at the throat and he wore no coat. "I'm all right."

They went out into the storm. The rain swept level into their faces, half blinding them. The wind pushed against them so they had to lean forward to make progress against it.

"If I'd realized it was this bad," the girl cried, clinging to Ed Parker's arm. "we'd have taken the car to the foot of the dock."

"It's only two blocks."

The storm-swept streets were deserted. They reached the dock and started down it. They could hear the sound of the water below and about them. The dock trembled to the smash of waves and spray whipped up and over them, putting the taste of salt in their mouths. Whitecaps made pale flickers against the night, and when lightning split the sky they could see the waves rolling in and the outlines of fishing boats tugging at their anchors. Then they were at the end and the dark hulk of the fishhouse blocked them.

"He's got a second floor where he lives" Mary shouted. "The stairs are over here."

They felt their way up, clinging to the banisters. At the top, the motion caused by the waves against the pilings underneath was more noticeable. Parker found the door, twisted the knob. It was locked.

He knocked, pounding hard to be heard above the noise of the storm. The door opened and they stumbled in, with the wind whipping after them until the door was closed. Then the sounds of the storm faded and there was only the faint rocking motion.

"I had an idea you were mixed up in this, Ed," Doulton said. "Come on in the bath and dry off a bit. You're not

doing my rug any good. I'll take your coat, Mary."

It was quite a place, Ed Parker thought, drying his face and hands in a tile bathroom, wiping the worst of the water from him. Probably Cortez had never seen anything like it before—and on the second floor above a fishhouse, at that.

He went back into the living room where Doulton and Mary Wilkins and Mike Travers waited. The rug was oriental, deep and soft. The furniture was modern, leather upholstered. The walls were of red gum and in the dim, indirect light they had a faintly bloody look.

"You like it?" Doulton asked.

"No," Ed Parker said. Water was seeping out of his hair, wetting his face again. His eyes were red-veined from the rain and salt water, the beard thick on his face. "No," he said again.

"I do," Doulton said.

He was making drinks at a small bar. When he passed them, Mike Travers downed his at a gulp, went over and made himself a second.

"I won't ask you to sit down, Ed," Doulton said. "You're too wet. But stand over there and tell us what it's all about."

"Did Anne Lacy ever see this place?" Parker asked.

HE saw a change in Doulton's face, the flinch of the muscles and the pain in his eyes as though he had been struck with a whip.

"No," Doulton said. "But not because I didn't ask her. She wouldn't come."

Travers turned from the bar. "Go ahead!" he snarled. "What are we here for?"

"To hold trial," Parker said. "Jury, judge, prisoner. And executioner. One of you killed my brother. If I can convince the other two of why and how and who, that will be proof enough for me."

"You mean—" the girl's voice sounded far away—"you're going to kill?"

He held out his hands. In the dim light his face was terrible. "I was holding Sam with my hands when he died. They should be weapon enough to revenge him."

Nobody spoke. Mike Travers took a long pull at his drink.

"All of you have an interest in what happened on the bay that night," Parker

said. "That's why you are here. Perhaps there will never be legal proof of what happened, but when we are through here, that won't matter."

The girl's voice was little more than a croak. "You're going to kill?"

"Yes," Parker said. "I started on this all wrong. I was trying to find why someone would want to kill Sam. Anne Lacy told me the truth. You had told me yourself Dean. Nobody wanted to kill Sam."

"Then what—" Dean said.

"The murderer killed Sam incidentally, almost killed me. The lives of other people meant nothing to this person. Tom Lacy was the intended victim. Sam died, burned, for no purpose. But I had thought it was Sam because of what had happened earlier. I'd forgot that he and Lacy looked quite a bit alike. A person seeing Sam stick his head above the cabin of a boat for a moment could easily have mistaken him for Lacy—especially if the killer knew that Lacy was aboard at that time. And if the launch had burned in the first attempt to destroy it, Lacy would have died as quickly as Sam. So it was Lacy the killer was after all the time."

"Why?" Dean Doulton asked.

"His name was Hanna, and a few months ago he robbed a bank of sixty-two thousand dollars. It was his second bank robbery within a short time. Probably he still had that money, or most of it, with him. He had come to Cortez to hide out. You wouldn't think of a bank robber earning his living as a fisherman. Whoever killed him wanted that money. But—" he said the words very slowly — "Tom Lacy had something besides money. He had a beautiful wife."

Doulton was leaning forward on the sofa. "Watch what you are saying, Ed!"

"Probably," Parker said, "Lacy's wife knew where that money was kept. Nobody would murder for money without being fairly sure he could get it. If the killer could get Anne Lacy, he could get the money along with her."

"Who—?" Doulton whispered.

"I want the three of you to judge. First, the killer had to know who Lacy was. Somebody who read a lot would have the best chance of stumbling on that information." The gaze of all of them went to the stacks of magazines on the bookcases. "Second, the boat was

destroyed with a time bomb of some sort. Descriptions of those things appear in the popular mechanics type of magazines, but even so it would take a fairly smart man to make one. Third, just before she was killed, Anne Lacy told me, 'There is no profit in swapping murderers.' She must have been thinking of a second husband, and he a murderer also."

lived with one murderer and she couldn't live with another."

NO one spoke. The storm beat outside. The room swayed with the waves. Parker's gaze went toward Mike Travers.

"You vote," Parker said. "Guilty, or not guilty?"

Travers emptied his drink. The

ONLY A FEW HOURS TO LIVE!



NICK BLADE, hardboiled Hollywood detective, couldn't figure it out. Why had gambler Merle Davis called him to Reno, and then, apparently, made plans to run out on him? Why would a man who was leaving for Europe by plane want to hire a private detective a few short hours before he took off?

Could it be because Merle Davis had a good reason to fear that he might never get away, and the only trip he'd ever take was on a final, fatal one-way journey of no return?

Merle Davis' pretty wife couldn't help Nick Blade. She didn't know why Merle had sent for him, couldn't begin to guess. But she spoke of a strange small golden dog, which Merle wore on his watch chain, and for some reason seemed to think it might be the key to the mystery. But then Merle was stabbed to death and the golden dog turned up missing . . .

DEATH HALTS A HOLIDAY, by Edward Churchill, skilfully tells this gripping story of mystery, action and suspense as Nick Blade tackles the most baffling, blood-curdling crime of his career. Look forward to this long novel—featured in our next issue.

Parker looked straight at Doulton then. "This morning, Dean, you told me that you felt sure that in time you could have made her love you."

It was quiet in the room, filled only with whispers of the storm outside.

"You've always worshipped money," Ed Parker said, "and gone about getting it the smart way. This way, you intended to get the money and along with it the only woman you ever really cared for. But the plan failed because she wouldn't have you. Maybe she loved you. I don't know. But she had

muscles of his throat worked. "Guilty," he said.

Parker looked at the girl then. "Guilty, or not guilty?"

"Eddie, you can't, you mustn't—"

"Did Dean kill them?"

"He must have. But you—"

"That's enough." He looked down at his hands, palms up, the fingers curled. He looked at Dean Doulton. He said, "I'm coming for you, Dean."

"No," Doulton said. His hand went back of a pillow on the sofa and out again and there was a gun in it now.

He stood up and his face was pale and bitter and handsome. He said, "You've stuck it together pretty well, Ed." The smile was twisted on his lips. "I did love her. You may not believe it, but I did. But she knew I had killed him. She kept after me until I admitted it. And then she started to tell you. I reckon I was a little crazy when I shot her."

"You had planned it earlier. You'd stolen the gun from Sam's house."

"Not to kill her. To kill you, if I had to. Now—" He held the gun steady. He said, "Get out of my way, Ed."

Ed Parker did not move. "How did you kill them?" he asked.

"I was with a mine detail during the war. And a time bomb is relatively simple, once you know how. It was even simpler to hide it in the boat the night before you went out. After all, it was tied up at this very dock."

They stood looking at one another and after a moment Doulton made a gesture half weary, half impatient. The gun came up in his hand and he said again, "Get out of my way, Ed."

"Where are you going?"

Doulton's smile was very twisted now. "I told you," he said. "I like this place here. It represents something to me. I don't want to spoil it."

He went past Ed Parker and into the hallway of the apartment.

A moment later they heard the bathroom door close.

After that came the sound of the shot being fired . . .

The telephone call had been made and the sheriff was on his way. Parker and Travers and the girl sat there in the

dimly lighted room and waited. The storm beat at the windows and the room swayed like the deck of a ship.

Ed Parker went over and made himself a drink, but the liquor didn't taste good to him. He needed it and he didn't like it. The world had a bitter taste now.

"Did you try to break in my place last night, Mike?" he said after a while.

Travers was getting drunk again. He glared at Parker and said nothing.

"Did you plan to kill me?" Ed Parker asked. "Or just slug me a few times, or set fire to the house?"

"I was drunk," Travers said sullenly. "I didn't know where I was."

"Now that it's all over, Eddie," the girl said, "what are you going to do?"

"Go back north, to my job."

She came over and stood in front of him. "Why don't you stay here, Eddie?" He looked at her without answering. Her eyes were yellow and her hair was blonde and her mouth was lush and red. She said, "Would you like for me to go north with you, Eddie?"

"The world is fouled up," Ed Parker said. He sat down and put his face in his hands. He felt tired and sick all the way through. For days now he had thought of nothing but his brother's death and of people only as pawns in the tragedy. "My brother loved you," he said slowly. "I never knew why. But you have helped me find the man who killed Sam."

He raised his head and looked at her. "I'm going back north," he said, "because I need time to think. I may come back here. But I'll let you know, Mary. I'll let you know."

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE

*F-N TEST?

*The Famous
Finger Nail Test

1 "It's F-N, the test for men! Scratch your head—if you find dryness or loose dandruff you need Wildroot Cream-Oil. Buy the large economy size.

YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK
LIKE THIS WITH NEW
WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL

2 Only a Little Wildroot Cream-Oil can do a big job for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long without a trace of that greasy, plastered down look! Your hair looks good and feels good too!



CREAM-OIL CHARLIE
SAYS: "IT CONTAINS
LANOLIN!"

3 TUNE IN: 2 NET.
3 WORK SHOWS!
"The Adventures of
Sam Spade" Sunday
evenings, CBS Net-
work; "King Cole Trio
Time" Saturday
afternoons, NBC
Network.





KLUMP a la CARTE

by JOE ARCHIBALD

LATE ONE afternoon three very prim looking members of the distaff side entered the office of the Hawkeye Detective Agency, Inc., William J. Klump, president. Willie could only furnish two chairs so he had to dust off the top of an old iron safe for the third person, which was appropriate enough, the old doll being half the mag-

nitude of a harbor tug.

"I have kept my business offices as small as this on purpose as too much publicity gits you well known with the crooks. I also try not to look like a detective."

"You have to try?" The skinny one wearing the fur boa sniffed.

The corpulent one got down to busi-

Willie becomes a moocher at Finnerty's Homelike Cafe just so he can help wash the dishes—and uncovers a sink of iniquity!

ness. "We are representatives of the Women's Third Avenue Civic Improvement and Guardians of the Public Health, Mr. Klump. I am Mrs. Alburnham O'Hooley, the president. These ladies are Mrs. Hildebrand Smeck and Miss Robena Prish. We have been trying to make certain restaurants and delicatessens adhere to the sanitary code, but can't seem to get no cooperation from the police. We have appointed a vigilante committee to get results."

"Where do I come in?" Willie asked, and quickly covered a comic book with his hat.

"There is one restaurant we can't seem to get the goods on," Miss Prish nasaed. "We know conditions there are abdominal and—"

"Natch," Willie interrupted, and Mrs. O'Hooley glared at him.

"Let me do the talkin', Robena," Mrs. O'Hooley said. "She means it's a disgrace, Klump. We are willin' to pay a fair fee for somebody to git the goods on that joint—er place."

"I see," Willie said. "About twenty-five bucks?"

The three crusaders ogled each other. Mrs. O'Hooley said, "All in favor of hirin' Mr. Klump signify by the usual sign. Opposed? None! Motion carried."

"Ten dollars in advance," Willie said. "The rest when I produce, huh?"

"Okay," Mrs. O'Hooley said. "But you write us out a recipe."

"What quick and dirty is it, ladies?" the shamus asked.

"Finnerty's Homelike Cafe," Miss Prish said. "We should warn you. If they should suspect who you are they might be very rough. Of course we'll pay a hospital bill within reason."

"Includin' one transfusion if needed," Mrs. Smeck said.

"I'll have a report within twenty-four hours," Willie said. "It is a privilege to take a part in civil improvement, girls."

WILLIE, when the three old dolls had departed, pocketed the ten-clam advance and picked up the phone. He got in touch with Gertie Mudgett at a certain beauty salon.

"Gert, this is Willie. Look, somethin' has come up. Business. I will

not be able to put on the nosebag with you t'night. Don't git sore."

"Who is?" Gertie yelled. "Always you look for an argument, Willie. An' don't think you're dispensible an' I will suffer until I see you ag'in. Anyways, leave me hang up as I got an old bag under the drier an' she's almos' done. Have a good time with the blonde."

"Look, Gert, it is no bl . . . Huh, she hung up." Willie pawed at his face and sighed deeply. "That is dames for you. You are innercent an' they want to believe otherwise. You git guilty an' they beat your brains out. You got more chanet of winnin' in a crooked dice game."

At six-thirty, William Klump entered Finnerty's Homelike Cafe on Third and Forty-seventh and selected a table as near to the swinging door of the kitchen as possible. Preliminary observations convinced the private dick that the three old babes had good cause to suspect that flies or thumbs were more often than not in the Finnerty soup. The pies behind the counter were exposed, and a formation of winged creatures were circling over the coconut custard preparatory to strafing it. A counterman chewed on the remains of a poisonous looking stogie as he served the stool brigade.

A lumpy henna-tressed cupcake came to Willie's table and leaned against it.

"Whatchagonnahave?"

Willie judged that the babe's apron had not been laundered since Pearl Harbor. He picked up the menu, shook crumbs from same and gandered the set-up *du jour*.

"The veal cutlet ain't bad," the waitress said.

Willie scratched his noggin, looked up. "Who typed this—a Litheranium or a Jugo Slob? Curned beef. Cudfish an' curn on the cub. Purk chups. Cuttage cheese an' ulive san'wich? An' apricuts. An'—"

"Look, Buster, the typewriter was used has an 'o' busted in halves," the waitress sniffed. "I ain't got no time to fix it with no pencil. Take your time as I just love standin' here like I was the Stature of Liberty holdin' a torch."

"I'll take the cutlet," Willie said testily.

He asked himself how he was going to get into the kitchen.

"Huh," he answered himself, "that is

going to be easy."

Then he saw a very big eyeful traipsing past. The sloe-eyed, lissome brunette ended up in the cashier's cage where she hauled out a compact and went to work trying to improve on a face that had no room for same. Appeared next a male character as big as the husband of a certain famous female golfer and he went over to the cage to slyly smooch with the taker of the tariff. It was very plain to see why Finnerty got his share of the customers.

Willie shared his observation with the waitress when she appeared with the cutlet that looked like a sun-curled shingle off a stable roof.

"Yeah, the boss ain't so dumb, mister. Wanna beer?"

Willie acquiesced, then attacked the cutlet. In the billious-looking gravy camouflaging it he found a burnt match and lost his appetite. He ordered a piece of soggy lemon-meringue and found little ticket-punchings stuck to the egg-white. He called the waitress and asked for the check. When he got it, he told her he had lost his wallet somewhere.

"An' I'm goin' to give you a chance to use another o' gag, Buster," the waitress said. "The black eye you'll have in a minute was got from runnin' into a door. Hey, Biff!"

The large citizen hurried over. "A moocher," the waitress said. "Finnerty won't like it if you t'row him out through the plate glass like you did the las' one. I'll open the door wide."

Willie said, "Let's arbitrate, huh? I desire t' do the right thing like washin' a few dishes an'—"

"Not bad," the waitress said. "One of our'n quit an hour ago, Biff. The sink is loaded t' the gills."

"Okay, Junior," the big character growled. "Foller me!"

Five minutes later William Klump's arms, as far up as his biceps, were as red as two brick chimneys. The private flatfoot made mental notes as he worked, hoping to remember at least one out of every six by the time he reported to his clients. He was pretty sure he'd bear one incident in mind, that one about the big mouse biting him when he reached for more soap flakes. He got a glimpse of a big pot of soup and asked what was floating around on top, was told they were croutons.

"With wings?" Willie wanted to know, and ducked a vicious swipe of a chef's cleaver.

FOUR hours later William Klump limped out of Finnerty's Homelike Cafe promising grim reprisal, the clatter of sudsy crockery in his noggin, his diaphragm all of a flutter as a result of the compote of the smells in Finnerty's kitchen. At the corner of Lexington and Forty-ninth he went into a tight spin and caught at a lamp-post, and a passer-by with a sugary voice and the new hemline gave him a helping hand. The little chickadee was helping Willie toward the nearest drug store when a cab pulled up. Out stepped Gertrude Mudget and Aloysius "Satchelfoot" Kelly.

"Plastered," Satchelfoot diagnosed elatedly. "What did I tell you, Gert! He was with a broad. Willie, you no-good—"

William Klump was immediately shocked out of all traces of vertigo when Gertie swung at the good Samaritaness.

"Look, lemme explain, Gert!" he howled. "I can prove—"

Gertrude Mudgett missed. A counter punch caught her right on the chops and both her earrings popped loose. Satchelfoot Kelly caught her under the arms and held her up while she wangled a partial plate back into place, and watched Willie run for his life.

"Okay, sister," the deliverer of the haymaker said. "You want t' go a couple more rounds later, I'm athletic director of a Y. W. C. A. I am leavin' my card."

"Huh," Satchelfoot philosophized, "Napoleon was the firs' t' find out, Gert." He eased her to the sidewalk and propped her up against the side of a meat market. "How's about leavin' me call a cab?" he said to the winner.

"That would be kind of you, I'm sure," the maid said, and let Satchelfoot have her arm. "A girl feels so defenseless this time of night."

A cab pulled up, drove away. Gertrude Mudgett got to her feet and pushed her hat from in front of her eye. Vowing to remove two citizens from the tax rolls, gripped by a Lucrezia Borgia complex, she groped toward the nearest underground. . . .

In his room William Klump wondered

how he was going to raise the scratch to get him as far away from the States as the Arctic Circle. Only there, he knew, would he be reasonably safe. The worry dew oozed out all over Willie. Finnerty's was now only a bad dream that had been and gone. This was a nightmare that hadn't as yet really whipped itself up. He would be guilty until Gertie proved him innocent, which she never could and never would.

"We're stalemates," he choked out. "What'll I do? If I can answer that I should try for double or nothin'. Of all the worst breaks can't be fixed up with a splint—"

Willie piled the dresser against the door and made sure the window was locked.

For three days Willie Klump moved about town as furtively as a cottontail lost in a timber overrun by hungry wolves. He disguised his voice when he answered the phone. Once it was Satchelfoot.

"Jus' checkin' up, Willie. How've you lived this long? I checked on Gert. She got a license t' pack a rod."

And Mrs. O'Hooley came to call.

"We had the place raided, Klump," she snapped. "That report you sent in must of been a fake. There ain't a cleaner place in town! We want the ten dollars back or we'll notify the cops."

Willie sighed, and paid. When Mrs. O'Hooley had gone, he snapped his fingers.

"Now I know where that badge of mine went. They got wise at Finnerty's as maybe they went through my coat while I was washin' dishes. I got a good mind t' quit this business."

Four more days went by. Then Gertie's voice sounded in the receiver of Willie's phone when he picked it up one afternoon.

"Oh, Willie, how can you forgive me? That dame come to see me an' tol' how it was an' proved she wa'n't with you that night an' we are now good frien's an' she is goin' t' give me boxin' an' wraslin' lessons. Ain't that swell?"

"It is great, ha ha!" Willie gulped.

"You poor darlin', Willie. Only you could ever git in such a compermisin' mess anyways. You must practice doin' it. If your fambly had a coat of arms it was an eightball rampart on a field of poison iv'ry. When will I see you?"

"I'll call you later," Willie sighed, and hung up. "I am glad she did not make frien's with a knife thrower," he told himself. . . .

NEXT morning, Willie was going through his mail which consisted of one circular letter ballyhooing a new mag when Aloysius Kelly entered the office. He wore a patch over his left eye.

"She sent me a package in the mail an' I figgered it was a present I sent her las' Chris'mas, Willie. I opened a box an' *whammo*, it was a jack-in-the-box with a hunk of lead for a noggin. I says I will see Willie an' tell him I was a heel."

"Don't flatter yourself with past tense, Satchelfoot," Willie sniffed. "I would trust you as far as I could throw the city hall with one hand."

"Oh, let bygones go by," Kelly said. "I would like to take you out for some beers, Willie. I know where is the best corned beef an' cabbage in town, too."

William Klump's spirit told him to tell Kelly he could go where he wouldn't need matches, but his flesh, not having been fortified by many calories the past forty-eight hours, was vulnerable.

"Okay, Satchelfoot. I am willin' t' give you one more chance."

They subwayed down to a bar and grill in the Houston Street neighborhood and were engaged in resuming diplomatic relations when a waiter came after Satchelfoot.

"It's Headquarters, Kelly. Looks like the Commish has t' git another sucker for a pinochle game. Why would anybody call you otherwise?"

The bonafide slewfoot hiked to the phone booth, spent a minute and a half inside it, then rushed back to the table.

"Willie, now I can show you I want t' be frien's. The Homicide Squad is on its way to a big empty lot at a Hunert an' Twenty-sixth Street where somebody found a corpse. You can go, too."

"You think I wouldn't follow you?" Willie sniffed, and gave himself a last faceful of corned beef. "You *would* ring me in on the rub-out of some stewbun that don't mean nothin'."

Less than half an hour later, Willie was with half a dozen other cops appraising the remains of a citizen who was clad in very nice haberdashery. The rigor mortis expert judged that the un-

fortunate character had been defunct for close to seventeen hours, and stated that he had been shooed off for keeps by a Betsy of approximately thirty-eight caliber.

"He ain't no burn," Kelly said, as he frisked the remains. "The criminal person or persons emptied his pockets of all identification. Awright, take flash pitchers of the scene, men."

The deceased was lying prone and when he was turned over, Kelly found the watch.

"An' ol' model gold turnip," he said. "The guy must of carried it fer sedimental reasons as he also had a wrist-watch as you can see by the stripe on his wrist. A huntin' case watch. Could be an inscription inside it. Leave me a loan of your penknife, Willie."

Kelly got the watch open and something fell out of it and landed at his feet. A small sheet of thin paper folded twice. He picked it up and had a cop center a flash on it.

"Just a mush note," he said. "Don't mean nothin' as it is signed only by 'Sugarface.' Lissen. 'Dear loover buy. Sure, I'm still that way oover my big hunk of manpower. What makes yuyu think different? Why, natch, we have a date fer Wednesday at eight yoocluck. Loots of loove.' What kind of baby talk is that, huh?"

"Or is it you can't read," Willie said. "Well, there may be prints of felons on file on that billy duke, so don't throw it away, Kelly. The deceased was a handsome gee in a sinister sort of way, huh? Was toted to this lot in a jaloppy, as look at the lint on his worsted suit from a sedan Smyrna."

"I was goin' t' mention that," Satchelfoot said irritably. "Anyways you got too much t' say for a B pitcher shamus. When we want your advice we'll ast for it, Willie."

"Not that I was asked either, Kelly," the M. E. said. "But he's got evidence under his nails he clawed somebody before he made his jump across the Styx. Well, you can have him for the deep freeze unit." He snapped his bag shut.

"With all these clues, Kelly," Willie said, "you should expect Margaret O'Brien to clear this up before lunch tomorrer."

"Make out we never drunk no beer

together t'night," Satchelfoot flared up "I should get my dome examined."

"It'll never be possible," Willie countered. "No X-ray that powerful ever has been invented yet. You would wreck a pneumatic drill. I'll watch the papers to see how far you git with this. Just as if I didn't know."

"Get lost, beetlehead!" Satchelfoot snapped.

THE next afternoon Willie Klump called an assistant D.A. he knew and inquired as to the identity of the corpse.

"We ain't got a thing, Klump," he was told. "There was prints on that note but they don't seem t' be on file nowhere. Up t' now nobody has identified the stiff. Looks like a gang victim . . . Say, Willie, why not come downtown an' see an ol' friend. I could use some laughs."

"There ain't no new stories goin' around," Willie said. "Oh, I get it. Listen, you—"

William Klump went downtown anyway, early the next morning. Mr. Bullfinch, the sub D.A. announced that Kelly had made an arrest that might stick.

"I would believe you if you said the Russians threw a veto away," Willie said agast. "Drive by ag'in a little slower."

"Yeah, a call come in from a cop lived in an apartment next to the empty lot," Bullfinch explained. "He got up with a jumpin' wisdom tooth an' happened t' look out the winder. He sees a jaloppy parked across the street by the big vacant lot an' bein' a cop first last an' always pulled on some clothes and went out to get a gander. He is a few yards from the sedan when it pulls away, but he gets the numbers on the license plate. Kelly traced the number through the motor vehicle bureau an' found out the jaloppy belonged to Big Grip Gargan, a bettin' commissioner, of all people. As Big Grip has been known to chastise certain gees quite roughly—"

"That took a lot of headwork on Kelly's part, didn't it?" Willie sniffed.

"Well, Satchelfoot did trail Gargan an' bring him in, Willie," Bullfinch said. "An' the big slob said he was drivin' past that vacant lot at between two and three a. m. an' got a cramp and had to park until he got his marbles back. There wasn't any scratches on him,

though, but there could be on his confederate. Kelly says he'll grill the identity of his accessory out of Big Grip, give him time."

"I would say the cops have a head start," Willie admitted begrudgingly. "Then that mush note didn't mean a thing."

"Exhibit A?" Bullfinch snorted. "Nah. There it is in the waste basket."

Willie did not know himself why he bothered to retrieve it at the time, but he did. He spread it open and idly perused it for a moment. Then he gasped as if a little gremlin had got wedged somewhere in his windpipe. Mr. Bullfinch became alarmed and reached for the phone.

"Poisoned food I bet, Klump. They been makin' a drive against unsanitary eatin' places, but—"

Willie stared at the following written words:

Dear lover buy. Sun, I'm still that way over my big hunk of manpower. Why, natch, we have a date fur Wednesday night at eight u'clock. Luts of luve. Sugarface

Willie choked out, "No, it can't be! Yeah, curnd beef an' curnd un the cub, but—"

Mr. Bullfinch got up and sidled toward the door. Once he had it opened he started running. Willie grabbed up his hat and hurried out himself, and he was halfway uptown before he realized he had the billet doux clutched in his big right fist. Ten minutes later the familiar smell of Finnerty's Homelike Cafe struck him flat in the kisser, and then he heard the lumpy waitress tell him to amscray.

Willie pulled himself together. "Maybe you don't know I'm a private detective, sister!"

"I wouldn't care a pantie offen a lamb chop if you was a general of 'em, Buster. Beat it, you chiseler! Sure, we found that tin badge that time."

"Yeah?" Willie asked. "Well, who was it banged out them menus on the typewriter is all I want t' know?"

"Who?" the waitress snapped. "The babe who was the cashier here. She quit over a week ago. I guess that boy frien' she had finally got her in a night club like he promised."

"Boy friend?"

"Why sure, you lemonhead. There

still are such things, thank heavens. This guy was some kind of a big operator an' was named Eddie Muzzell. I seen him come in a dozen times. He always lef' me a buck tip."

"You got that typewriter?" Willie yelped.

"Nah. It was Dreena's. We usta letter the bills of fare by han' but nobody could hardly read 'em an' Dreena says it would look classier if we should type 'em out, so she bought along the LaCorona an' knocked 'em off."

"Also with a Roscoe," Willie said abstractedly.

"Wha-a-a-a-a?"

"I said somethin'? Look, what is the babe's real name an' where does she live?"

"Dreena Del Roye. I never knew where she hung out, Buster. An' why ast me all these questions? You'd think she murdered somebody!"

"Ha, wouldn't you?" Willie sniffed. "Now what you got t' do, sister, is come down to the morgue an' identify a corpse whicht I am positive is Eddie Muzzell an' whicht can't be put in a cemetery until it is. Why, you could get your pitcher in the paper because of this."

"I could?" The lumpy femme took off her apron and tossed it aside. "Wait'll I change, big boy. Won't take more'n a minute."

WILLIE sat down at a table and went to work with a pencil as if his thoughts were not soon put into writing they might just as well not have cut loose from his noggin.

No. 1. The papers, come to think of it, mentioned the mush note found in the defunct character's watch, and if the pip of an ex-cashier was as smart as she should be, she would—

A big hand dropped to Willie's shoulder. "Why, you punk stool pigeon! Dirtyin' up a clean cloth wit' a pencil, too! Awright, one—two—three—"

"Leave go of him, Biff!" the waitress yelped. "He happens t' be a frien' of mine."

"You're fired, Flossie!"

"No kiddin'? Where'll I send you the reward? Come ah-h-hn, Sugar. Also I might tell you how crumby this joint really is." She took Willie by the arm.

"Let's get out of here, huh?"

"It is my fondest wish," Willie choked

out, sputtering and coughing.

Down at the stiff repository the waitress took a gander at a specimen, wheezed out, "It's him—it's Eddie Muzzell," and swooned. A hovering newspaper legman hurried to a public utility coop and feverishly spun the dial.

Willie fanned the lumpy doll with his hat, led her out and to the nearest subway kiosk, and gave her a nickel. Then he went to a phone and called Mr. Bullfinch.

"Yeah," he told the assistant D.A., "Eddie Muzzell. I am told he was in the chips. I would have them grill Big Grip Gargan an' make him confess now. Most likely a lot of racketeers'll recker-nize Eddie's name an' we'll get the low-down on him."

"Thanks, Willie. I'll tell the D.A. you're cooperatin'."

"Tell him I am also broke."

Certain underworld characters admitted they had heard of Eddie Muzzell but stated emphatically that he was not in any of their enterprises. "Bosco" Spumoni, bubble-gum vending machine monopolizer, claimed Eddie owned a fifty-and-hundred-buck club meatball named "Kayo" Dilley.

Willie was downtown when Satchelfoot grilled Big Grip Gargan. The betting biggie snarled and waxed indignant.

"Never heard of the punk! I know personal every gee on my pay roll an' you think I'd do the job myself if there was a doublecrossin' employee had t' be knocked off? Go ahead an' ast me questions as I got nothin' else t' do. You try an' prove nothin'."

"Kelly has been doin' that for years," Willie said, and went out. He had to look for a dame. "Hah," he said to himself, "Eddie couldn't have made his roll even on quiz programs. The waitress said he . . . There is one thing I must do."

The president of the Hawkeye forgot that one thing for a while, though. He went uptown to see Bosco Spumoni who told him Eddie Muzzell used to live in two rooms in a modest apartment hotel just off Lincoln Square. Willie went to that place and found cops holding off a mob trying to get into the place.

"They're tryin' t' rent the two rooms," one gendarme hurriedly explained.

Willie finally got in to see the super an hour later. He was told that Dreena

Del Roye had also lived there, but had moved out some time ago. She left no forwarding address.

William Klump made his way to his office and did the thing he'd almost forgotten to do. He consulted a classified directory and then started calling places where typewriters were bought, sold and repaired. He guessed he had called six dozen places within the space of an hour. They would all check up and call him back, they assured him. He was getting groggy as he conversed with the seventy-third prospect.

"Y-yeah, a portable doll with a brunette keyboard," he droned out. "This typewriter has eyes like Hedy LaMarr but her o's are cut down t' u's. Dreena La Corona—yeah, a Del Roye typewriter."

"I think you're batty," the man said, and hung up.

Willie felt a little empty inside and went to an old filing cabinet and found a three-day-old cruller in a paper bag. He ate half of it, then picked up a stack of correspondence he had been trying to laugh off for three days. Each one said he would please remit. The deadline on most of them were as close to him as his skivvies. Suddenly he took paper and pencil and started a letter to the custodian of all the clams he had ever gleaned out of the Hawkeye Detective Agency.

Dear Gert: I got to have a hundred and fifty bucks right off as I am desperate. I will not have no roof over my head and will also be evicted from my office. I will be ruined. If I don't git the hundred and fifty by return mail I swear I'll—

HE could not make up his mind right away as to just how he would plan his own demise so he took time out to make a pot of coffee. He plugged in the hot plate and then placed it on his desk.

"I could jump out the winder," he mumbled as he measured out the java. "But I'm scairt of high places. I could tell her I will take poison or would turn on some gas."

Willie turned his attention to finishing his own dunning missive while the jamoch perked. Then he heard the door open and swung around in his chair.

Two citizens nodded to him. One was a male who looked like an ad man of distinction who had switched to Cal-

vert. He had a waxed mustache, big shoulders and just the right amount of white at his temples. The party of the second part was a female, a platinum blonde wearing a short fur Benny and a skirt that was a shame considering the kind of gams she had been endowed with. She had a wide mouth which was was well shellacked and a pair of eyes that stirred the sleeping butterflies in the Klump diaphragm.

"You are Mr. Klump?"

Willie nodded, surreptitiously tugged at an electric juice cord and shoved a big dictionary against the hot plate.

"But what is the idea snappin' that Yales lock?" Willie got up slowly. The dame was smirking at him. "It is a mistake whatever it is, as I never saw either of you in my whole life."

The doll closed the transom. "See, darlin'?" she said to the male. "I told you he wouldn't recognize me."

"Who-o-o are you?" Willie choked, as the male citizen displayed a very ugly-looking Roscoe.

"Tell him, Baby."

"Remember Finnerty's Homelike Cafe, Junior?" the doll tossed at Willie.

Willie tried not to. He also told himself he was crazy to think this glamour puss was Dreena Del Roye.

"What a dumb jerk," the converted platinum blonde purred as she walked toward Willie's desk.

The big character motioned Willie toward a wall where there was no window.

"You think after I heard about the note they found in Eddie Muzzell's watch, I'd sit an' wait for the cops to come with the wagon?" The doll sat down on the side of the private dick's desk and took a cigarette case out of her beaded handbag, selected a long coffin nail and touched it off.

"I will scream for help," Willie said in a voice that seemed filtered through mud.

Mocking laughter.

"You wrote somethin' on a tablecloth at Finnerty's," the cheesecake number said. "Who did you think would see it—the F. B. I.? The big slob named Biff gave me a buzz at a certain place he knew he might find me. He don't know from nothin' but he had a hunch after what happened to Eddie I might be in a spot. So he tipped me off to what you

scribbled just in case. Maxie, this Keystone Comedy flatfoot is almost top dumb t' be real."

"But we don't take no chances he has done somethin' by accident, Baby. He's gotta go!"

"You ain't kiddin', honey," the blonde said, and idly picked up the letter Willie had been writing.

She read it in a hurry, stared wide-eyed at Willie, then laughed gloatingly. The president of the Hawkeye wondered if this was the Inner Sanctum.

"Maxie," the blonde said, "this is our out. This dumb ox wrote it for us. A suicide note."

"Wha-a-a-a-a-a-a?"

Willie became petrified and he slapped both hands against the sides of his whirling noggin.

"Oh, only I could think of doin' this t' me!"

The dame read aloud to Maxie. Maxie shook his head incredulously, then laughed mostly under his belt.

"Oh, brother, what a setup!"

Dreena Del Roye's peepers shot lancets at Willie.

"Thought I was a dumb babe, huh? I wouldn't think after they found that note on Eddie you cops would maybe trace that typewriter with the bum 'u' on it? Guess you don't know how much me an' Maxie have got at stake, you mental runt! Sure, I think back. They found a tin badge on you the day you washed the dirty dishes, Klump. Then after Biff tipped me off snoopin' was bein' done, I said I'll beat 'em to the punch. Like Mahoomit I didn't wait for no mountain to fall on this kid."

"She's a smart number, Klump," Maxie grinned. "She says the cops'll call typewriter places an' check who brung in a La Corona to get fixed an' that her address would be left there. I'm a lucky guy awright."

"Thanks, honey," the dame said. "Let's git this over with."

"You won't git away with it," Willie said.

The gee named Maxie said, "Sit down in your ol' chair, Klump, as that is where you are t' blow your brains out."

"What brains, Maxie?" the ex-cashier taunted. "I'll bet the joint'll be filled with sawdust. We ought t' tell the punk why we got t' do this."

"I will, Baby. You see, pal, Dreena

was only workin' at Finnerty's while certain heat got took off," Maxie boasted. "Eddie Muzzell also had a sideline an' his managin' a dumb meatball was only winder dressin' to keep the cops thinkin' he was legit. But maybe you recall maybe six or eight months ago a swanky joint on Park Avenue was touched for sixty grand worth of jewels. Well, take a look at the brains behind it. Some gorgeous package, ain't she?"

Willie took a gander at the doll. He had to admit she was. It occurred to him that the only other bit of fluff he would ever ogle would be stringing a harp or preening her wings, and his spinal column began a La Conga.

"Yeah, an' she an' Eddie had t' lay low until the heat was off an' t' line up fences would handle the rocks," Maxie went on.

Willie had to ask, "But why was Eddie Muzzell knocked off?"

Dreena Del Roye stifled a yawn and consulted her wristwatch. "I'll answer that one, Maxie," she said. "It seems Eddie crossed me by hocking one of the baubles behind my back. Then I meet Maxie and I know even if Eddie had kept his nose clean I would of got rid of him."

"Sure, Klump. Look at me an' then think of Eddie's pan," Maxie grinned. "A swell gal like Dreena deserves the best. I guess I was just born lucky. Here I fall into sixty grand and git me a million-dollar baby at the same time. Yeah, we eased Eddie off an' took him for a ride an' dumped him."

Willie looked at Maxie's right hand and saw the healed scars.

"Sure, he rushed me just as I was goin' t' let him have it, Klump," Maxie snapped. "We wrestled for a sec an' he nearly made me drop the Roscoe, but I got him. Tell me if I'm wrong, Klump. A private flatfoot hides most things he finds out from real cops as why should he let them in on secrets, huh? I bet they don't know from nothin' about us downtown."

"You are a fiend," Willie gulped, and wished he could tell Maxie he was wrong.

"Okay, let's git it over with, Maxie."

"Get in the chair, Klump. Baby, when I give you the office, you drop that big book on the floor, see?"

"I'm ready. Hurry up."

Willie Klump staggered to his chair and fell into it. He could hear the splash of oars and the popular tune the River Styx ferryman hummed as the shores of Never-Never-Come-Back-Land came closer. And he had given his assassins a perfect alibi and wished he'd busted his writing arm a week ago.

The dame with the platinum blonde wig took her place and reached for Webster's best seller. Willie knew that Maxie's mustache was a fake, too, and that the signs of age around the mugg's ears were also misleading.

"Okay, Klump, turn your dome to the side a little as I don't want t' mess you up with two shots," Maxie said a little impatiently. "I'll just lean forward like this, Baby, an' git him up clost as it has t' be suicide."

"Stop makin' a speech, Maxie, an' give it t' the punk!"

Willie shut his eyes and shuddered, and thought, "Why she could some day be somebody's mother!"

Maxie leaned forward and pressed his left hand down against Willie Klump's hot plate and then he let out a great roar of pain that lifted Willie right out of his chair and popped his eyes open. A Betsy clattered to the floor and then Willie suddenly realized the heat really wasn't off the criminal persons, and he sprang into action.

The blonde blister also recovered surprisingly fast and threw the big wordy tome at the Klump coco. It grazed Willie's pate and put a blur in front of his face for a few seconds, but he fell right on the liquidator and dug in as far as the linoleum rug would permit.

"Get him, Maxie!" the doll screeched and covered Willie and got both her fists filled with his corn-colored hair, and pulled.

The tears streamed from Willie's glimmers as he lifted himself up like a bucking bronco and threw the babe loose. He rolled over on his back and saw big Maxie diving for him and he wondered if he'd go through the floor and into the lap of a stenog in the office below.

SELF-PRESERVATION was the first law Nature had passed and Willie was for it a hundred per cent and so he brought up both feet when Maxie was about to make a three-point landing, and

kicked very vigorously. *Oomp!* Willie's Size Twelve brogans got Maxie plumb in the breadbasket and the big crook did a halfspin and landed on the floor with his nose down.

The fake blonde still had fight and some moxey left in her, and Willie saw her winding up with the empty beer bottle just as he flipped over on his stomach again and got his hand on the artillery. The bottle just missed the Klump cranium, hit the wall and came up with a billiard shot that ended just above Maxie's left ear.

"Shot or I'll stoop!" Willie yelled. just as half of New York seemed to be trying to break in.

Dreena Del Roye legged it to an open window, looked out, changed her mind.

"The devil with it," she gulped. "I'll sing for the Commonwealth!" She sat on the sill and gaped at the Betsy Willie had pointed right at her bra, and then the door gave way.

A big elevator man was in the van wielding a fireax. Next came a big cop, and five characters who believed in peace in our time.

"What goes on?" the cop yowled.

"What would you expect in a detective agency—a sugar maple party?" Willie managed to articulate. "Watch these two dishonest citizens close as they rubbed out Eddie Muzzell. An' the doll here with half her wig off was in on a sixty-grand jewel haul not so long ago. They come here t' rub me out." Willie went over and looked at the floor plug where he'd connected the hot plate. "Hah, it wasn't quite disconnected an' give off with enough juice t' keep the life-saver hot. Maxie could not shake a pair of dice for a month at

least and anyways where he will end up won't have just a poor connection. I think I have the gat washed up Eddie Muzzell."

The decided blonde put up quite a fuss before consenting to accompany the limbs of the law. She had an eye now that matched her real hair and an ear almost as red as her kisser.

Maxie owned up to be an ex-con who had been dabbling in a little burglary. His last name at the moment was Luza. he said.

"Spelt with a 'o' and 'u'?" Willie grinned. "It looks like that was a hot menu I picked up that day in Finnerty's. huh? Who'll have a cup of coffee, as the plate is still hot."

"I don't believe this," Dreena said dolefully, "even if it has t' be true. I'll talk!"

Downtown, sometime afterward, Willie sat in the real D.A.'s office feeling sorry for Satchelfoot Kelly who was sitting at a desk trying to figure it out with pencil and paper. Kelly had eaten half the pencil before he gave up.

He said before he groped his way out into the hall, "I am goin' on a lost weekend an' hope it stays lost with me. He'd be president t'day, instead of Harry, if only he'd been born the village idiot." Kelly slammed the door.

"Jealousy must be awful t' have, D.A." Willie grinned. "How much reward did you say I'd git from the Park Avenue citizens? A thousan' bucks?"

The D.A. brushed spots away from his eyes. "Yeah, Willie. How do you do it?"

"As if I knew," Willie sniffed and reached for his hat.

As if anybody knew.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

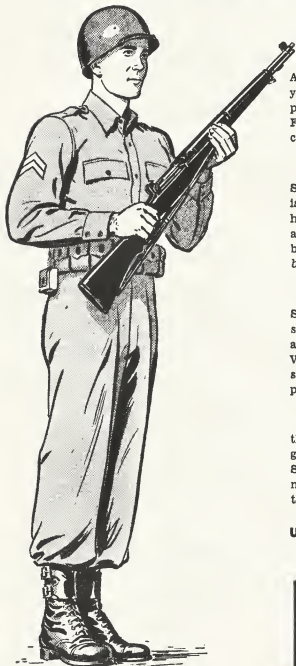
STUCK WITH THE EVIDENCE

Another Rib-Tickling Willie Klump Howler

By JOE ARCHIBALD

PLUS MANY OTHER CRIME NOVELETS AND STORIES

"I'M PROUD TO BE IN THE COMBAT FORCES!"



Any member of the Infantry, Artillery, or Armored Cavalry will tell you — and very quickly, too! — that he's proud to be part of the Combat Forces. For this is a truly select group—the sharp cutting edge of the U. S. Army.

Physically, the modern Combat Soldier is husky and alert. Mentally he is way above average. The Combat Soldier handles weapons of astounding force and accuracy; and he can travel fast and far, by air, sea, or land transport. He *has to be all man* because he has a great job!

In the modern Army, Combat Soldiers get the fine treatment they deserve. High pay. Good food, clothing, and recreation. Medical and dental care. Variety of training among many valuable skills and trades. The finest retirement plan anywhere. Many other benefits.

If you're between 17 and 34 and think you're good enough to make the grade, get more details at your Recruiting Station. Ask about the Combat Forces—now considered the top-notch group in the big Army team.

**U. S. ARMY AND U. S. AIR FORCE
RECRUITING SERVICE**

CAREERS WITH A FUTURE

**U. S. Army and
U. S. Air Force**

Hatful of Trouble

*When Moody Hackett is called on the Everett-Olga case,
he's told it's the most desperate of terrible crimes and
when he views the horror he agrees — with a chuckle!*

CHAPTER I

The Horror



ELLA was all excited when I got the Everett-Olga case.

"We're coming up in the world," she told me after I hung up the phone. "Everett-Olga! Imagine!"

"It sounds like a song-and-dance team

to me," I said. "Just who or what is Everett-Olga?"

She looked at me as though I'd asked her what the White House was, but I was leveling. I'd never heard of Everett-Olga, but the man who'd talked to me on the phone had seemed to take it for granted that I'd know. As a matter of fact, his tone of voice made it sound as though I should have dropped the receiver and given three low salaams when he told me who he was.

"This," he told me, "is Everett, of Everett-Olga."

He waited for a second, apparently giving me time to get my breath. I looked through my office door into the reception room, where Ella was listening in on the extension, as always. She

wiggled her eyebrows and waved a hand at me, so I knew Everett-Olga, whoever they were, were solvent at least.

"Uh-huh," I offered. "This is Moody Hackett, of Hackett's Agency."

"Quite so," said Everett, of Everett-Olga. "You've been recommended to me, Mr. Hackett, as a private detective whose—ah—discretion can be relied upon fully."

"We have that reputation," I bragged.

"Yes," said the deep voice at the other end of the line. "Yes, indeed. Admirable. I'm calling to ask you to call at my office at—let's see—at eleven twenty-two this morning."

I checked my watch. It was quarter past ten. I didn't have a thing to do until nine that night, when I had a tail job, but I didn't quite like the idea of Mr. Deep-Voice giving me a royal summons.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I'm on a case that will keep me busy most of the morning. Unless it's an emergency, I'd prefer to make the appointment for this afternoon. Or I could send over an operative."

"It is an emergency," said Everett, of Everett-Olga, "and no operative will suffice."

"In that case," I said, "I might be able to change my schedule. Could you—er—give me an idea of the kind of case this is?"

a novelet by **ROGER FULLER**

Mr. Prangini backed
away from me,
scared stiff



"I can't," said the deep voice. "I can't discuss this—this terrible thing over the phone. But I assure you that it is a dire emergency. I shall inform my secretary, Miss Lenning, that you are to be expected at eleven twenty-two. Please don't be late. Thank you."

Click. I hung up my phone carefully as Ella came rushing into the room, babbling about how we were getting up in the world.

"Wait a minute," I told her. "You forget I've been out of town for a couple of years. Is this hyphen combination a dance duo or a restaurant?"

"Hats," said Ella, happily. "The best hats in the world, and maybe, if you do a good job, Moody, they'll give you a hat as a sort of bonus."

"I've got a hat," I reminded her. "I paid seven bucks for it in 1941, just before the government took over supplying me with hats, and it came through storage in good shape."

"I'm talking about women's hats, stupid," Ella snapped. "Everybody knows that Everett-Olga makes the best women's hats in the world. Or at least they're the highest-priced."

I had a faint tinge of memory then. One of the picture magazines had carried a lay-out on some hat salon where movie stars were outfitted at about a hundred and fifty bucks a throw.

"They don't accept everybody as a customer," Ella was going on. "You have to be in society or on the stage or somebody famous before they'll even consent to give you a fitting. Why, to be invited to open an account with Everett-Olga is something like getting a bid to an Astorbilt dinner."

I grunted something. Most women's hats, to me, are better left in the hall closet, and for a couple of designers to play it so smart as to have monied people just panting for a chance to be clipped for a figure in exchange for a heap of felt, fur and feather junk made me slightly sore—or envious.

"They must have dough," I told Ella.

"They do," she said, beaming. "And more than that, if we do a good job for Everett-Olga, there's no telling what an entree it will give us into shops of that class."

"Uh-huh," I said. "Who knows but that some day it will be a mark of dis-

tinction to have your divorce evidence handled by Moody Hackett's peek and prowl emporium."

That brought Ella down out of the clouds. It's funny, but Ella hates divorce work and that's the backbone of the private detective agency, much as I hate to admit it. Life would be beautiful for Ella if only there weren't any transoms to look over, no apartment doors to crash, no flashlight pictures to be taken, no weeping babes imploring you to tear up the evidence. But Ella likes dough just a little less than she likes me, and she accepts divorce cases, gritting her teeth as she does.

"Cheer up," I told her. "Be a good girl and I'll bring you back an Everett-Olga hat and, furthermore, I'll bet you ten bucks you won't know the front from the back when I hand it to you."

Mr. Everett had told me to be there at eleven twenty-two. Ordinarily, I'm pretty apt to be a couple of minutes late for an appointment, if only to make the man who's waiting for me perhaps think I'm so busy I just can't keep on my schedule. But I was in front of Everett-Olga's shack at eleven twenty, just to see why he was so insistent that I be there at eleven twenty-two.

It was quite a place, the hat store. It had a chaste white marble front with a canopy leading to the curb and a guy about twelve feet tall in uniform at the door. The front of the place was blank wall except for a window about two feet square. That was occupied by a single hat on a dummy head. The hat was really something. It looked as though two cats had started fighting in a mess of colored feathers and the battle had ended in a draw. While I was staring at it, wondering if it was really a gag, the big doorman edged over toward me and gave me the up-and-down.

I LOOKED up at the doorman and then back at the hat. A bell began to ring and I moved aside as the doors of a freight elevator swung up and the car came up to the sidewalk level. The elevator was empty and nobody made a move toward it.

I looked at the elevator and then at the doorman. He stared right back at me. He didn't want me hanging around that window and that's why he'd pressed

a button somewhere, probably in the door jamb, and brought up that freight elevator, making me step aside.

I thought about asking the giant if he thought that perhaps I was a hat thief, but my watch said I had only a minute or so to get to Mr. Everett. The doorman looked a little surprised when I headed for the sacred portals, but his face was a blank when he pulled open the heavy grilled door for me to pass through.

"Guard that window with your life," I hissed when I passed him. "I think the thing's going to have pups at any minute."

A luscious creature with coppery hair and a complexion right out of a skin lotion had whispered toward me over the thick carpet. Her dress was of black satin and it fitted in the right places.

"Yes?" she asked. Her voice was husky and quite warm for November.

"Mr. Everett is expecting me," I told her. "My name's Moody Hackett."

She hesitated, decided to smile faintly, and pointed an exquisitely tapered hand in the direction of a slender chair near the entrance.

"If you will wait, Meester 'Ackett," she said. "Mees Graham, please tell Mees Lenning that Meester 'Ackett is 'ere to see Meester Everett. By appointment, no?"

She looked at me and I nodded.

"By appointment, yes," I said. "Eleven twenty-two. I've got forty-six seconds to go."

Mees Graham turned out to be a blonde in a dress like Copper Hair's and a figure that was almost as good. I watched her disappear in the direction of the rear of the salon and then turned my attention to the customers—pardon me, clients. I recognized three women in as many minutes as gals with lovely faces that often had been seen in the public prints, either in the society or stage and screen news. Then I saw Misty Warner, whose name had appeared in other columns besides society and movie. I knew Misty quite well, having handled the divorce jobs for her third and fourth husbands.

There were two other creatures in black satin huddled around Misty, putting on something that looked like a man's opera hat that had fallen under

a threshing machine. The two girls in black were very serious about the whole thing, as though they were performing some sort of rite, but Misty was giggling.

"Lemme look at myself in the light," she said. "These darn lamps you have in here hide the worst. How about wearing it outside and seeing what I look like in a hand glass?"

One of the girls in black satin shook her head with determination.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Ketrick," she said, "but that is not allowed."

"Afraid I'll frighten myself?" Misty asked. "Well, okay, if it's a rule. How about over here at the window." She moved to a window—the one window in the place, and pulled aside the drape to peer at herself in the glass. "Holy Pete," she chortled, "I look like Snow White's stepmother in this thing. I know it's Everett-Olga, and I know it's supposed to be good, and I know I'll probably wind up buying it, but I don't have to like it, do I?"

CHAPTER II

Pirates



THE TWO clerks made shocked noises. Misty squinted at herself in the hand glass again, touched the top of the awful hat with a light finger and then went back to peering at herself. She shook her head, finally.

"When will Everett be back?"

One of the salesgirls shrugged.

"It's impossible to say, Mrs. Ketrick," she murmured, just loud enough for me to hear. "These trips are so indefinite."

"Uh-huh," said Misty, "and so convenient. Seems to me he takes a trip every time I try to see him." She looked narrowly at the salesgirl. "He wouldn't be ducking me, by any chance, would he?" she asked.

"Mrs. Ketrick," said the girl, in an anguished voice. "How can you say that?"

I was trying to make myself as in-

conspicuous as possible on my chair when Misty's eagle eye lit squarely on me and she headed in my direction, her mouth curving into a big grin.

"Hi, Moody," she said. "You're not tailing me again, are you?"

That was Misty Warner-Allen-Kennerly-Bautz-Clayton-Kettrick for you. She'd called me some things that hadn't been included in the book when I collected the divorce evidence against her for Kennerly and Bautz, but Misty was a live-and-let-live gal.

"No, ma'am," I said, politely, climbing out of my chair and looking pleasant.

"Didn't think you were," she said. "When you were tailing me the last time, I didn't even see you once. You're cute when you're following somebody around, Moody. You're cute anyway, come to think of it. Come on out and buy me a drink. I've been looking at myself in Everett-Olga hats until I'm beginning to think I really look like that."

"Sorry, Miss Warner," I said, because I always called her that, not being able to keep up with her husbands. "I've got an appointment."

"Who with?" she asked me.

"Maybe I want to buy a hat," I hedged.

"And maybe you're here to see that big bum Everett," she told me. "I *knew* he was ducking me. He better had, too. When I see him, I'm going to cut him up in little pieces. The bum sold me a hat that was too much for even Kettrick to pay for. Swore he'd just created it; or Olga had. I couldn't wait to wear it. It was cute, with sort of dingle-dangles on it, and a whoosit, right in the middle."

"Sounds interesting," I said.

"And what do you think happened?" she asked. "The first time I had it on, I ran smack into another woman wearing the exact same thing. Not only that, I saw four of them the same day. Exclusive! Phooey! I might as well have bought it in a bargain basement somewhere."

I clucked my tongue, watching the blonde Miss Graham approach.

"Terrible," I said. "Now, if you'll excuse me—"

"The brush-off, huh?" Misty said, darkly. "Well, when you see that big bum Everett, tell him for me he can't hide from me forever. And tell him that

if I see a copy of one of these hats I've bought today anywhere within three months, I'll make his name mud in the best circles."

She swung around to face Miss Graham. The vision with the coppers hair and the faint accent bore down on Misty. My pal was speaking in an above-conversational tone and her voice carried. A couple of patrons of the swank salon were looking in our direction, wondering what was up.

"Mrs. Kettrick," said Copper Hair, in a hushed voice. "Meester Everett haff told you it is a tarrible thing, thees copy of your 'at. He is desolate, believe me. You know 'ow he is, so temperamental—he cannot eat or sleep w'en he 'ears what 'appens to your 'at. A copy! It is unthinkable!"

"Investigate it," Misty said, with a grin. "Get m' friend Moody, here, on the trail. He's a detective. He's the cutest little snooper in the business."

I COULDN'T do anything but grin feebly back at Misty. She made a couple of more cracks and then left, still promising to have Everett's scalp if any of her hats were copied. Miss Graham and the woman with the coppers hair sighed in relief.

Miss Graham then became all business.

"This way, please, Mr. Hackett," she said. I started wading through ankle-deep carpet beside her.

"Sounds like you've had trouble with the copy-cats," I said, to make conversation. Miss Graham's beautiful shoulders shrugged under the black satin.

"It's terrible," she said. "Of course we've had our hats copied and pirated before, but nothing like this."

"I should think," I said, "that it would be fairly easy to copy a hat—especially one of yours hats."

She shot me a sidelong glance and smiled.

"It's not as easy as it looks," she said. "Most men might not know what makes a really fine hat, from a woman's standpoint, but women do. These copies really are good—I've seen some of them. And the amazing thing is that they show up at almost the same time that we have our model ready."

"Somebody in the shop, maybe?" I asked.

She looked at me again and she wasn't smiling now. She was pale and there was a drawn look about the mouth.

"I'd hate to think so," she said, simply, and left it at that.

We went down a short hall and stopped in front of a white door. Enscribed on the door, in script fashioned from beaten copper, was the word "Everett." Miss Graham tapped gently on the door. It was opened by another blonde. This gal was a little older than Copper Hair or Miss Graham, but she sure had been beautiful in her day.

"That is Mr. Hackett, Miss Lenning," my escort said. "Mr. Everett is waiting for him."

"Thank you," said Miss Lenning, but her eyes didn't say that at all. Her eyes said: "I hate you, you witch," as plainly as though the words had been spoken. I glanced at Miss Graham and her eyes were talking right back at La Lenning's, in the same vein.

Miss Lenning stood aside and I passed through the portals. I found myself in a dove-gray reception room that could have been a boudoir, for all the hangings it had. I twisted my hat in my hand, half expecting soft music to start playing at any moment.

"This way," said Miss Lenning.

There was another white door and another name "Mr. Everett," in copper, with the word "Private" beneath it. Miss Lenning swung open the door and I found myself a little breathless, despite myself.

"Mr. Hackett," said Miss Lanning, and stood aside again.

I don't know just what I'd expected Mr. Everett to be like. I do know that I was totally unprepared for the giant who reared himself out of the chair behind the wide-topped desk facing the door. This man was all of six feet four and he had a pair of shoulders on him that would have been his meal ticket on any pro football team. He also wore a beard, a deep brown, bushy beard with a little wave. He reached over the desk to shake my hand and when I got my fingers back I knew I'd been hand-shaken.

"Mr. Hackett," he said, "you have the reputation of being a good private detective, one of the best in New York.

"Well, now—" I began. He held up a hand, so I stopped denying that I was

one of the best men in New York at my line.

"This is your task, Mr. Hackett," Everett said. "It is your assignment to track down the wretch who is copying my masterpieces and bring him or her to justice."

"You mean somebody is making hats like yours?" I asked.

HIS hands went up to run thick fingers through his brown hair.

"Hats!" he cried. "You make it sound as though I were turning out thousands of hats a day to be stuck on the heads of everybody who wants to keep the rain off her hair. What I create are masterpieces, Mr. Hackett! They are not to be mentioned in the same breath with these horrible things one sees masquerading as adornments for the head."

He leaned forward on the desk, clasp- ing the big hands together in front of him.

"I have spent my life," he told me, "learning how to create hats which complement the personality, the very soul, of those who wear them. I struggle, I perspire, I agonize over each of my creations. I have spent six months, unable to create a single hat, and I have worked for thirty-six hours without eating or sleeping, perfecting one hat. I have made my name the finest name in the art of hat design, but only after years of suffering, Mr. Hackett—only after years of suffering!"

I kept waiting for him to give me the gag, the snapper. It didn't seem possible to me that this big guy with the beard was actually serious in this ham- act monologue he was giving me, but that's the way it was.

"So now, Mr. Hackett, what do we find?" he went on. "We find some un- holy genius, some demon, able to learn all my secrets, to read my mind, to re- produce my masterpieces, almost as soon as I, myself, have created them."

"Perhaps," I said, "you'd better ex- plain the hat-making set-up to me, so I can get an idea of how this copyist works. And there's the question of a fee, too, Mr. Everett."

He waved a hand to banish the men- tion of mere money.

"Whatever it is," he said, "I will pay it, and gladly, because—because should you fail to uncover this—this fiend, the

world will most assuredly lose its greatest hat designer."

That widened my eyes a little. I got the idea that he planned to do the Dutch act, just because somebody was making hats like the ones he made. I guess Everett saw what I was thinking because he waved that ever-ready hand of his.

"Not self-destruction, no!" he said. "I would not give this demon that satisfaction, although I believe that is what he or she is trying to drive me to. Instead, I shall retire from this field entirely. Let the world mourn the loss of Everett and his hats, I shall not come back to this means of expression. I shall become a sculptor, a painter, a great poet, but never shall I design another hat."

"Wouldn't that be playing right down somebody's alley?" I asked. "I mean, if some other hat designer wanted you to quit the field and rigged it so that your hats were copied and you quit making them, he'd have accomplished his purpose."

Both hands went into the air this time.

"Ha!" he half screamed. "You think other designers would think up this scheme? I say they would not because they are honorable people, all those whom I recognize. No, this is something personal—something aimed at Everett, the genius, not at his business."

"Well," I gulped, "have you any enemies who might—uh—take this round-about way of hurting you? Personally, I should think that anybody who had it in for you that bad would use a lead pipe wrapped in newspaper, or something like that, instead of going to the trouble of having your hats copied, on the slim chance that you'd give up the work in disgust and turn into a poet."

The words said themselves, in all their bluntness. I wasn't sorry I said them, because I was convinced by now that this guy was a crack-pot and needed my services about as much as I needed a hole in the head.

"I don't think," I said, "that it's anything you need my services for. You see, Mr. Everett, our agency has a lot of expenses and—"

"How about a five thousand dollar

fee?" he asked me.

I swallowed. "Fine," I said. "But—" "No buts!" he shouted. "I am determined to foil this—this evil genius before he breaks down my will to create entirely. Money? Pah, what is money? I have plenty of that. But I have my soul"—tapping the lapel of the tweed coat—"to protect."

CHAPTER III

The Alley



R. EVERETT looked at me appealingly. I smothered the desire to say "Rats" and reached for a cigarette. While I was lighting it, the secretary, Miss Lenning, spoke in a flat, slightly harsh, voice.

"I think," she said, "that you've got the wrong slant on this, Basil. I think it's entirely a commercial proposition."

Everett swung his head toward the blonde.

"You think!" he bellowed. "Good heavens, whoever gave you permission to think? I think that somebody is trying to destroy my creative fire, and what I think is so."

Miss Lenning took the blast without wincing.

"Just the same," she said, stubbornly. "I think you ought to tell Mr. Hackett about Miss Graham—and her brother."

"Deliver me," he moaned, "from jealous women." He turned to me, waving his hands. "Don't listen to her, Hackett. Miss Lenning has been with me from the start, and now—now that she finds herself not the youngest, nor the most beautiful, woman in a room, she begins to imagine things."

Miss Lenning winced that time, but her eyes didn't falter. It was easy to see her position. She called the great Mr. Everett by his first name and had been with him for years and he responded by kicking her around in public, taunting her about the fine lines around her eyes and mouth, the suspicion of a sagging chin. Nice guy.

Mr. Everett gave a short, barking laugh.

Consider, Mr. Hackett," he said. "Miss Lenning is quite the amateur detective, herself. She has it all figured out that the pretty Miss Graham is at the bottom of this plot to ruin me. All because Miss Graham has a brother who, just returned from the wars, is struggling to make a name for himself as a hat designer. I've seen his work. The boy has some talent, undoubtedly, but he is no genius."

"At the same time," Miss Lenning flared, "it would be a simple matter for Miss Graham to memorize the lines of certain hats in the making and give the information to her brother. He could design the same hat and peddle it to a production firm."

"Enough!" Everett thundered. "You talk like a fool, Cassie! How could a pretty, rather empty-headed little girl like Elizabeth Graham memorize all the individualistic touches that have appeared in the copies we have managed to examine? Could you memorize those things? Could anybody?"

He turned back to me.

"The workroom employes," I suggested. "How about them?"

He raised his bushy face and glared at me.

"You think, possibly, that I have a loft with rows of sewing machines, thousands of bolts of felt, bags of feathers, yards of furs, with a hundred girl going stitch, stitch, stitch, turning out two-ninety-eight hats? My workroom employes? There are none. I design the things. I make them. Only I know what has gone into them."

"Dear Basil," said a musing voice from behind me. "Always so self-effacing."

I turned to look at one of the most striking women I have ever seen. She was tall, with a narrow face and pointed eyebrows, emerald eyes and an olive skin. She was wearing something long-sleeved and clinging and her hair was black and shining, as though lacquered. When she walked into the office, her skirts whispered faintly.

She smiled at me, all red, red lips and white teeth.

"Now Basil," she said, in a husky, mocking voice, "just what are you up to? One of the girls, Jeanne, came to me with the startling news that a private detective was in our midst. Has the safe been robbed?"

Everett lowered his eyebrows and grumbled. "More than the safe has been robbed, Olga. My spark of inspiration has been threatened with extinction."

"Dramatics, again," Olga said, lightly. She turned to me. "I presume you've been given a highly colored version of what, actually, is nothing more than a bit of pirating on the part of some clever cheap-Jack milliner. It's been done before, and it will be done again."

"He must be very clever," I said, "to steal ideas right out of Mr. Everett's creative mind. I understand that the copies appear simultaneously with the originals."

SHE shrugged. "Not quite that fast," she said, with another smile. "Dear Basil has been known to exaggerate. It's the poetic license theory, I suppose."

"Now listen, Olga," Everett rumbled. "You know that that's exactly what's happened. It's as though the fellow sits in my brain and copies down my very thoughts! It's—it's unnerving!"

"Yes, Madame Olga," Miss Lenning, the fading blonde, Everett's flickering light-o'-love, put in. "It has been as Mr. Everett says. You remember Madame Tze-Chuen."

"Ah, that one!" Everett bellowed. "That was the worst. Hackett, I worked more than a week with that client, worked in bald daylight, at the window, so that I could get the full shade and texture of the Oriental skin against the colors and line I created. Then as Madame Tze-Chuen wore that hat out of this place—that very moment, mind you—she was met by some half-caste creature wearing an identical hat."

Olga looked uncertain at the memory of that occasion.

"Betty Graham and her brother," muttered Cassie Lenning.

"I'll retire. I'll quit," Everett groaned. "Ogla, you'll have to cary on without me."

I looked at Olga and saw her glance at her partner with an expression that might have held scorn and contempt, or possibly just anxiety over the prospects of losing the creative genius of Everett-Olga.

"Tell me," I asked, suddenly, "have any of your creations been copied, Madame Olga?"

Her green eyes regarded me for a mo-

ment and then the smile came slowly.

"One," she said. "A poor little thing of which I wasn't very proud. I was quite flattered, as a matter of fact, that anyone thought it worthy of pirating." She shrugged. "But there was nothing uncanny about its being copied. I leave my unfinished models around, here, there and everywhere, for anyone to study, if they have time to waste."

"And whose hats beside the Chinese lady's have been copied?" I asked. I was getting an idea, faintly.

"Mrs. Ketrick's most of all," Everett mourned. "I wish I'd never seen the wench."

"Ah-hah, Basil," Olga laughed. "You know you were head over heels in love with her, not so long ago."

"A mild flirtation," he protested. "How did I know she'd take me seriously? My word, the woman's a leech. Always wanting to see me about nothing. And now, this. And you insist that we keep her on our list of clients, Olga."

"To keep fresh in your mind," said Olga, smiling, "the wisdom of limiting your amours to the personnel of the establishment."

Cassie Lenning's head jerked up at that one. Quite a joint, Everett-Olga's. Lenning was jealous of Graham, and Olga was jealous of both of them. Maybe, I thought, I'd have better luck with the ladies if I raised a beard.

The two women's eyes met, clashed and dropped away in a split-second duel.

"And now, dear Basil," the woman in the hostess gown said, "please finish your instructions to Mr. Hackett. Really, though, it seems absurd to me to bother a busy man like Mr. Hackett over something that will blow over of its own accord."

"One more hat," Everett said, grimly, "and the world will have to get along without the genius of Basil Everett."

"Of course, darling," Olga said, "and there'll be no more copies, I'm sure. But hurry, please, because old Mrs. Vandenberg is waiting."

The big man groaned and shook his head.

"I can't bear it," he said. "I get no response in my creative being to Mrs. Vandenberg. She is nothing but a mass of wrinkles. Even the sunlight won't give her color. I've had her stare into the sun until she must have gone nearly

blind, and still no touch of anything but gray or dead-white."

"A couple of questions," I said. "These copies are exact?"

"Yes," Everett said. "Some of the colors have been different, not all. The basic colors are always identical. Some of the touches were changed."

"And the hats that were copied were those made for Mrs. Ketrick and the Chinese lady?" I asked.

"And old Mrs. Vandenberg has had one of hers copied," Cassie Lenning said.

"And my little hat was also pirated," Olga added.

"You worked with Madame Tze-Chuen by the window?" I asked. Basil Everett nodded. "And Mrs. Vandenberg, where did you work with her?"

"By the window," Everett said. "You see, it is necessary to get sunlight on certain shades of skin."

"I see what Mr. Hackett is driving at," Olga said, with a laugh. "Some other designer is crouched on the fire escape—only there is no fire escape—copying your hats, Basil, before rushing off to make a duplicate. But Mrs. Ketrick doesn't need sunlight, does she? And, besides, remember I had one copied, also. And I was nowhere near a window."

She smiled at Cassie Lenning.

"You're with Basil so much, Miss Lenning," she purred, "maybe you can tell us something."

LA LENNING'S mouth hardened.

"Do you think I make these copies, Madame Olga?" she asked, in a cold voice.

"Good heavens, no, darling," Olga trilled. "Everybody knows that you're no milliner. Your talents lie in—ah—other directions. I'm only saying that if anybody could memorize an Everett creation, it would be you."

I got out of the office before I went as whacky as dear Basil. I trotted downstairs, backtracking the way I'd come with my fragrant escort, and finally got to the salon where I'd talked with Misty. Amid beautiful women and some not quite so beautiful, I did a little prowling, thanking my stars, meanwhile, that Everett-Olga was not some lingerie emporium. As it was, I got plenty of dirty looks from the gals who were getting fittings.

It was the window, of course, that in-

terested me. I didn't know where Everett dilly-dallied with Madame Tze-Chuen or old Mrs. Vandenberg, but I'd seen where Misty had stood, and that was enough to start with. I pulled aside the heavy drapes at the window and squinted out through the heavy pane.

The window looked out into a narrow alleyway. Backed up against the alley, opposite Everett-Olga was a tall narrow building with a red brick back, apparently a remodeled brownstone, such as are scattered all through that part of town. There was a city truck blocking the alley and the Sanitation Department's weight-lifters were playing basketball with trash cans.

If you've prowled as many back alleys as I have—in line of duty, of course—you'll know that the street numbers of the buildings backing on the alleys are always somewhere in sight. Opposite the building occupied by Everett-Olga were 338, 340, 342 and 344, all in a position where they could get a peek at the window where Misty Warner had stood. Numbers 340 and 342 were the best shots at the window.

"Yessa?" asked that faintly accented voice behind me. "Perhaps I can 'elp?"

I dropped the curtain and turned around. That girl sure was a beautiful thing, even if she was looking at me with calculating amber eyes.

"Just admiring the view," I said, cheerfully.

"Please," she said, in a low voice. "I understand you are the detective, as Mrs. Kettrick said. Per'aps I can 'elp."

"Perhaps, I said. "Have you got any ideas about who's responsible for copying the hats?"

She shrugged her perfect shoulders. "Only ideas," she said. "Whoever it ees must be almost the genius that Everett ees. To make the copy so good ees onusual. To make it so good and so fast ees onbelievable. *Mais impossible!* It takes perhaps a month, perhaps longer to make a hat."

I asked a couple of questions that didn't mean a thing and got out of there. The familiar clamor of the street outside was soothing, after that hatmaking establishment. I headed around the block and gave a look at 338 to 344, on the next street over.

Number 338 was a well-known night club. The others were brownstones that

had housed some of the most elegant families in New York, in other days, and now were chopped up into apartments. I pressed the bell button over the little sign: Superintendent, at 340.

The super was a big, dour Swede with a walrus moustache and a surly disposition, for which he couldn't be blamed, I suppose, seeing that he probably was called to the door to say no to apartment hunters a thousand times a day. I made my apologies and told him I was hunting for a friend of mine named Burke who had just moved into a house somewhere around here, but I wasn't sure of the address.

"Not here," he told me. "We got no apartments and we don't expect to have any."

I clucked my tongue and shook my head.

"I sure hate to miss seeing my friend," I said. "Maybe you've seen somebody moving into one of these other places Tall, thin guy with a game leg. I've looked at the doorbells in the foyers, but I've got the idea he hasn't had time yet to change the old name and put his in. He wrote me he had a back apartment."

"Not here," he said. "Maybe he's at three forty-four, up the street. They handle a lot of transients, show people. Maybe your friend got a room there."

CHAPTER IV

A Drawn Gun



AFTER thanking the guy, I went to 344. I rang up the super, who turned out to be a fat woman in a house dress. I went into the Old Pal Burke routine. "No," she said, shaking her head. "I haven't got any Burke in the house."

"A back apartment," I said. "He—well, he's known on the stage as Connelly. Maybe he used that name."

Another head shake.

"No Connelly," she said. "Most of my people are permanents, right now. There was a Mr. Prangini who rented three-D, that's a back apartment, and he's the

only one who's new. He's been here a week or so, too, so it couldn't be your friend."

I looked like the saddest guy in Manhattan. "While I'm here, incidentally," I said, "are you expecting any vacancies? I mean, I'm looking for a place to live, like everybody else."

She gave me the up and down.

"I might have that place Mr. Prangini has, open in a few days," she said. "When he took it, he said he wasn't definite about how long he'd stay. He don't use it much, anyway. Couple of hours a day, and not every day, either. He never sleeps here. Seems a shame to waste that living space, even if he does pay good rent."

"Is he show folks?" I asked. The head shook again.

"He says he takes pictures for the newspapers," she told me. "Anyway, he's got a lot of cameras and things."

Mr. Prangini, then, was my boy. It almost had to be a camera that was clicking off pictures of the hats Everett made for Madame Tze-Chuen and old Mrs. Vandenberg. And Misty Warner, too, who insisted on going to the window and posing.

"I'll be back to see about the apartment," I told the landlady. "Or maybe you could let me see it now, just to give me an idea."

She shook her head with the ease of long practice.

"These days," she told me, "you take what you get and consider yourself lucky. And generally the folks that take the apartment are so grateful they have a little gift for the super. And it's only right, too. I'd surely have a little something for anybody who found me a place to live."

I tried again, but I couldn't get to see Mr. Prangini's place. I gave up, finally, and walked on down the street. While I was giving the fat lady time to get back to whatever she was doing, I dropped into a pub and sat there, nursing my drink and thinking over what I knew.

It shaped up that Basil and Cassie Lenning had been chummy once, but now Basil was making eyes at Elizabeth Graham. Graham had a brother who was trying to break into the hat designing racket. He probably was finding it

a tough struggle and maybe he'd learned how to cut corners in the Army, the way I had. Maybe his sister was making it easy for him to make copies of Everett's creations by popping them into the window for him to photograph from 3-D. Maybe the Graham girl's brother had been in the Signal Corps.

Or maybe Mr. Prangini wasn't Elizabeth's brother. Maybe he was just a hired cameraman. Hired—by whom?

Well, did Cassie Lenning really take those jibes of Everett's and still come back for more, still loving that man of hers, or did she really hate him? Did she hate him enough, perhaps, to give him one grand case of screaming meemies by seeing to it that his stuff was copied and thrown on the streets at the most embarrassing times?

And where, I asked myself, did Misty Warner fit into this screwy picture? I was sure she did fit into the picture somewhere because she'd voluntarily gone to the window and posed for Mr. Prangini. Bearded Basil, of course, had made a pass at her and when she had responded, Basil had given her the brush-off. Maybe this was her way of showing Basil that he couldn't play that kind of baseball with her.

CCHECKING my watch, I saw that I'd been away from 344 long enough to let the landlady get back to whatever she was doing, so I finished my drink and walked back there. I got inside without being seen and walked up to the third floor. Three-D was at the head of the stairs, in the back of the house.

I hoped Basil Everett hadn't finished fussing with old Mrs. Vandenberg's hat. If he was working on it still, it was a good bet that Mr. Prangini was working, too, with his little camera.

I laid my ear against the door and heard muffled movement inside. I tried the doorknob easily and found the door locked. The second key I tried fitted, I turned it and stepped inside, my gun drawn.

He was crouched at the window, peering into the finder of a Graphic with a telephoto lens. He sure took an interest in his work, did Mr. Prangini. He didn't hear me as I crossed the room and he didn't know I was there until I spoke. Then he jumped about twelve and a half feet and went *guh*hh.

He was a little fellow with black hair and the face of a startled monkey. He backed away from me, scared stiff.

"What're you doing in here?" he asked.

"I'm crazy about photography," I said. "Somebody told me you could teach me how to make steal shots with a telephoto lens. Of hats."

He swallowed and his Adam's apple went up and down.

"I—I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"Maybe they'll explain what I mean down at Centre Street," I told him. "They're right interested in photography down there, too. Especially pictures of hats."

I didn't say I was a cop, but Mr. Prangini got the idea somewhere that I was. He looked more scared than ever and backed away another foot. I reached out my hand.

"I'll take the camera," I said. "And don't try to pull the slide on any of those plates. Just give me the box and the plates and we'll take a ride and you can explain everything to the right people."

He licked his lips and his eyes went from one side of the room to the other.

"I—uh—it's just a gag," he told me.

"Sure," I said. "It's just a gag that you take pictures of copyrighted stuff and wreck a million dollar business doing it. Some gag."

I reached out and took the Graphic out of his hand. I put away my gun. The plates he'd taken were in a leather carrying case on the floor, beneath the window. I grabbed the strap of the case and lifted it to hook over my shoulder.

"Come on," I said. "Let's get started."

His tongue ran over his lips again, and he gave that darting, cornered-rat look at me and then at the door.

"Don't get any ideas about trying to run for it," I said. "The house is full of people."

Well, the house was full of people, wasn't it? I didn't say it was full of police, but Mr. Prangini got that idea.

"Look," he said, in a jerky voice. "I ain't no thief or anything like that. I got hired with the understanding that this was just a gag. The fella that makes hats across the way is supposed to be a big shot and this lady that hired

me says we'll just take some pitchers of him workin' at the window, like he does, and maybe we can sell 'em to a picture magazine, or something, on account of he don't let hardly nobody watch him work."

"Make up your mind," I said. "It was either a gag or a business proposition. Which was it?"

He thought that over for a second. "It was a business proposition," he said. "Yeah, I took the shots to sell to a picture mag. There ain't no law against that, is there?"

"And do you peddle the prints?" I asked him. "Or does the lady that hired you?"

His eyes switched around and came back to me. "I—uh—she does," he told me. "Yeah, that's it—she does. I just give her the plates, is all."

"Okay," I said. "I'll check up on that. Who's this lady who hired you?"

He didn't want to tell me.

"Come on," I said. "I haven't got all day to horse around with you. Maybe you'll tell them down at Centre Street."

That did it.

"Her name's Ketricks," he told me.

SO, I told myself, it was Misty who was behind the whole deal, after all. Little Misty getting back at Basil for giving her the cold shoulder.

I walked over to the window and looked across the alley. I could just make out the figure of Basil, towering over a dim blur that must have been old Mrs. Vandenberg, in the window of the building across the way. I looked, blinked and looked again.

"The sun's not right for good pictures, is it?" I asked Mr. Prangini.

"As right as it ever gets," he answered, sulkily. "That's why we haven't gotten anything decent yet."

"Nothing decent?" I asked. "What do you mean, nothing decent?"

"Take a look," the little guy said. He waved toward an envelope that was on the desk near the window.

I looked through the prints that were inside the envelopes. They were darned good shots of the back of Everett-Olga's building, but that was all. No telephoto, no matter how good, could dig through the alley shadows, the thick, almost opaque glass of the window and come up with anything sharp enough for any-

body to use in making a copy of a hat.

This whole thing was beginning to look like a gag, after all. Here was a shutter snapper, busy as a little bee taking pictures that would have required a genius to have made a hat copy from. And the copies were almost identical with the originals, except for different colors in some places. And they came out at almost exactly the same time that the originals were put on madame's head.

"Look," I told Prangini. "I'm going to take a chance with you. I think you've been played for a sucker in this hat-snapping business. I'm going to turn you loose. But if another one of Everett-Olga's hats is copied, it's the pokey for you. We know where to get hold of you, Prangini, when we want you."

He was almost tearful with his thanks and then he gave me a double-take.

"If one of them hats is copied I'm in trouble?" he asked. "Hey, listen, you can't blame me for any copy of any hat. How can a guy copy a hat from what I've been gettin'?"

"I don't know," I admitted, "but just the same, you're elected if any more copies come out."

"See that Ketrick dame," he pleaded. "She'll tell you we ain't got anything anybody could use for a copy job."

I saw the Ketrick dame but that was quite a bit later that day. First, I made some phone calls and saw some people. My third call got me the name of a man who knew the hat industry, wholesale, retail and exclusive, from A to Z.

"I'll tell you, if you don't quote me," he said. "Everett-Olga has been slipping for a year or so, and it's all Everett's fault, as far as I can make out. He always was a temperamental guy and lately, I understand, he's been sulking, refusing to design hats. This trouble they're having now might put the zinger on the whole firm. It would be tough on Olga, if it did. She's worked hard to get that firm up where it is, and she never got the credit that was due her. She's good and she's fast, in her own right, but Everett's always hogged the applause. It would be a shame to see her lose out this way."

"She could open up her own place," I suggested.

"It wouldn't be the same," my informant explained. "It's the label that means everything in this profession, if

you want to call it that. A Madame Olga label wouldn't pull any weight to speak of, at least compared to an Everett-Olga label."

I managed to get Basil on the phone then. I asked him a couple of questions and had an answer for all the suspicious questions he asked, which were plenty.

"I did not retain you to pry into personal affairs," he told me. "I retained you to track down the fiend who is stealing my creations."

"I'm coming up with the fiend," I told Basil. "Hold everything."

CHAPTER V

Sucker



FINALLY met up with Misty at her Park Avenue place at cocktail time. She was on her way out, but she let me in and even offered me a drink.

"Always glad to see Moody," she told me. "Always liked Moody. Never forget the time at the Graylock Hotel

when you—"

"Never mind that," I told her, hastily. "I've got a couple of questions to ask you. I've been talking to your Mr. Prangini."

Her eyes went wide and then back to normal. "I don't believe," she said, "that I know my Mr. Prangini."

"He takes pictures," I said. "He's got a little place at three forty-four Fifty-sixth Street. He takes pictures of hats. Everett-Olga hats. He took a picture of you today, just before we met."

She looked down at her glass and then up at me. The corner of her mouth curved and she began to giggle.

"Anyway," she said, "it was fun while it lasted, Moody. The photographer worked for peanuts, and Ketrick happens to own the place at three forty-four. That Basil Everett needed a needling, anyway. I could almost hear him screaming from here, when those copies started to come out."

"Which you whipped out with your own little hands," I said. "I never knew you were so clever with a needle."

She laughed and leaned over to refill

her glass.

"You know I couldn't sew a button on, Moody," she said. "I had the hats made in New Jersey, Newark. At least, the man said he was from Newark."

"You were never there?" I asked her.

She shook her head.

"Nope," she told me. "I'll explain what happened. When that big beard brushed me off, I swore I'd get even with him. Somebody suggested that having his hats copied would burn him worse than anything else. So I arranged to have the pictures taken and the hats made in New Jersey."

I thought that over awhile. "Look, Misty," I said. "Somebody is playing you for a patsy and I know who it is."

"Patsy!" she half shouted. "Listen to me, Moody Hackett! Nobody plays Misty for a patsy. I did the whole thing myself and I'm gla-aad."

"You might have thought you did it by yourself, but you didn't," I said. "All you did was talk yourself into a set-up that might cause you one great big headache. You're fooling with a million-dollar business, not some jerk who can burn up and nothing else. Do you know what Everett-Olga's name is worth a year? Even you'd be surprised, and you've paid for those dizzy hats, so you know the price per copy. Multiply that a couple of thousand times and you'll get the idea. And it's the label that means the dough. Suppose you wrecked the worth of that label with your gag, wouldn't that mean trouble for you?"

"Well," she said, "I never looked at it as big business before. The whole thing was just a joke, Moody."

"Sure," I said. "That's the way it was put to you—and for a reason. This somebody came to you, knowing you were sore at Basil, and put the copying bug in you ear. That somebody probably arranged for Prangini and the guy from Newark, too. But if the copying thing was traced down, it would be Warner who'd be blamed. Prangini blamed you. The guy from Newark would blame you. Your name would be cold, black mud."

"B-but—well, I guess I should be blamed, shouldn't I?"

"What for?" I asked, in turn. "For paying a photographer to take pictures that weren't an earthly bit of good to anybody."

"No good to anybody?" Misty cried. "They made copies from them, didn't they?"

"Uh-uh," I said. "Nobody ever made a copy from those blurs. Use your head, Misty. Who stands to profit if Everett blows his cork and quits the business? He's threatening to, and the people who know him say he's very likely to do it. I talked with Basil and he tells me that his partnership agreement has a clause that says that should either of them quit voluntarily, the other inherits the Everett-Olga name. That name's worth a lot of dough."

"Then—" Misty began.

"Sure," I said. "Olga's the one behind the whole thing. Olga tipped you off with the idea of having the hats photographed and copied, didn't she?"

MISTY hesitated before she said, "Well, she—she sort of dropped a word."

"And she must have mentioned Prangini," I said. "Remember?"

"Well," Misty said, slowly, "she did mention him."

"She's clever," I admitted. "Everett was sulking, refusing to turn out hats, cutting down production, cutting down receipts. She needed him for the name that meant the dough. She had to make him quit voluntarily. She knew you had a grudge against him, so she planted the bug in your ear about copies, trusting you to do the rest. She fed you Prangini and the guy from Newark and she sat back and made the copies herself."

"You mean Olga made the copies?" Misty asked.

"Of course," I said. "It took a near-genius to do it, and somebody who was fast. Everett might be suspicious of anybody else watching him work, but he'd hardly suspect Olga. She could watch him build a hat and then make an almost exact copy, but fast. And from memory."

"But why did she go to the trouble of getting me mixed up in it?" Misty asked.

"Because she needed a patsy," I said, bluntly. "She suspected Basil might call in somebody to investigate and she knew the trail would lead right to you, if he did. And you'd admit it and she'd be in the clear and ready to figure out a new plan to get rid of Basil and still

keep the name."

Storm clouds began to gather on Misty's face. "Why, that—"

"Take it easy," I cautioned her. "I'll see Olga and I don't think there'll be any trouble about anything, after I explain what I know."

There wasn't, either. Madame Olga listened, beautiful, imperial, gorgeously gowned in black velvet, at her apartment while I went through my recitation. Her eyes might have hardened a little, as I went on, but that was the only change in her face.

"So there you are," I told her, when I got through. "That's the report I suppose I ought to turn in to Mr. Everett."

She used a long ivory holder and the smoke curled around it and her hand as she held it to her lips.

"Of course you know," she said, "that you couldn't prove any of this."

"I think we could," I said.

"We?"

"Mrs. Ketricks and I," I said, calmly. "She's retained me to—er—protect her interests in the matter."

"I see," Olga said, slowly.

"I've talked to Prangini and Ingersoll, in Newark," I said, holding my breath and hoping the Recording Angel didn't have an ear turned in on my wavelength. "I think they'll sing, and loudly, if they have to."

She had her legs crossed and the toe of one slipper was nodding slowly as she considered the set-up.

"And what," she asked me, "do you intend to do—tell Everett?"

"Suppose," I said, "we keep the story

in my files. Then—if there was another case of copying, we could refer to that file."

The hard eyes softened miraculously, and Olga's face relaxed a trifle. "You mean—you'd do me that favor?"

I hunched my shoulders. "Why not?" I asked her. "Nobody's been hurt badly, outside of Everett's nervous system, and I imagine that when this copying disappears, he'll come back to normal. I don't see any point in wrecking a successful partnership, just to prove I can find the person I've been commissioned to find. You two ought to patch it up enough to keep the business going."

"I think," she said, calmly, "I'll marry Basil. That way, I can keep him under control."

"A swell idea," I said. "And you might give Mrs. Ketricks a couple of hats, to soothe her injured feelings."

She nodded, although she didn't look as though she enjoyed the idea much. "And you," she asked, "what about your fee from Everett? He'd hardly pay unless you produced."

"I didn't spend much time on the job," I said. "I'll settle with you."

Her eyes hardened again. I guess she expected a sweet bit of blackmail.

"I—I'm not as wealthy as some people think," she said.

"All I want's a hat," I said. "A hat for my secretary, Ella Whitcomb. An Everett-Olga hat."

Ella got her hat and it was a beaut. I never did have the courage to tell her that she was wearing it wrong, with the front and back at the sides.

DR. SPIKER HAD A DATE — WITH DEATH!



Marian Grady turned down a pleasant social evening to meet her physician employer at a tree-shaded suburban estate. But a sinister someone had kept another rendezvous with him in—

BLACK SHEEP KILL by Dale Clark

In the next issue of POPULAR DETECTIVE

Red Martin came back like a
sinister ghost — but no
such luck, he was in
the flesh

He was whimpering
and snuffling at my
feet as I unwadded
the picture and
looked at it

Roll them Bones

by KEN LEWIS

I WAS sitting on the front porch, watching the sunset, when "Red" Martin turned into our drive. I hadn't seen him for almost two years, but I knew him at once. The memory of that lean, red-headed figure was burned too deeply into my brain for me to forget.

He was on foot, with his coat slung over one shoulder, and I figured from

that that he must have hit town on the five-fifteen and walked here to the farm.

"Lou can tell Nina to stop moping now, Luke," he said. "Hubby's come back."

I spat into the dust beside the steps and looked him over. He hadn't changed much. Same cocky grin the women admired so much. Same sneer hiding behind that grin. He had a pair of tiny

gold dice that he always carried, and he kept tossing them up and down as he talked.

It was a kind of trade-mark with him. His two accomplishments in his world were making women and dice perform as he wanted them to.

"She's not here," I said. "She wouldn't see you, if she was."

He walked over to the corner of the porch, and his grin was an open insult now.

"Sure she would, Pop. You know she would. I hear you talked her into filing for a divorce."

I didn't answer. I hadn't talked her into it. I hadn't had to. But I didn't mean to discuss it with him. He looked toward the open shed where we keep the Ford, and shook his head.

"So she's not here. Where is she—over at Joe's? Don't tell me she's shackling up with Joe already."

I got up and started for him, but his grin only widened.

"Never mind, Pop. I'll leave a message. Just tell her she can forget all about that divorce. If she ever sets foot in court I'll make it so hot for her she'll never dare show her face around *this* town again."

"Red," I said, my voice shaking so hard I could hardly talk, "you're the latest and smelliest of a long line of skunks. You know she never did anything wrong. The only wrong thing she did was to get hooked up with you."

He laughed, and the dice flashed in the waning light.

"What she did or didn't do isn't in it, Pop. It's what people believe she did that counts. You'd be surprised what a smart lawyer and a couple paid witnesses could do to your little girl's reputation. Women don't walk out on me. I walk out on them. Unless of course you want to make me an offer. I'm always open to a good business proposition."

I SLAMMED into the house and locked the door. I was afraid of what I might do if I stayed out there. His laugh followed me into the hall, and then I heard his footsteps die away from the drive.

I was glad Nina had taken the Ford and gone into town. She was just now beginning to recover from the torment of her life with Red in the city. Seeing

him again, learning he had followed her here, might bring it all back.

I waited till I was sure he was out of sight, till he'd had time to reach the old Martin place up the hill, then I headed for Joe Lake's quarter-section to the south. As I reached the road I met "Spec" Martin's flivver coming up the grade. He slowed when he saw me. His thin, wizened face was flushed, and excitement heightened the cast in his bad eye.

"Hey, Luke!" he called. "You hear the news? Red's back!"

He sounded like there ought to be dancing in the streets, like the whole county ought to turn out to welcome Red back. I guess Spec was the only man in the township who hadn't seen through his brother long ago.

Not that Red hadn't given him plenty of chance. When the uncle they lived with drank himself to death two years before, Red had grabbed all the old man's cash, while Spec had to be content with the wornout hill farm. But Spec never seemed to resent the fact. He followed Red around like a puppy, whenever Red let him.

"Yes," I said, "he was past. He's already up to your place, by now."

He grinned like a kid on the last day of school.

"You'd think he'd let a feller know! I was over to Waterton picking up some seed corn—didn't hear a thing about it till I stopped by the station on my way home!"

I nodded and walked on down the road. I knew why Red hadn't told anyone he was coming. He had wanted to surprise Nina, had wanted to see her squirm.

I found Joe Lake in the barn, working on his car. He was a small, slender boy about Nina's age, with curly black hair and quiet, steady eyes. He and Nina had been engaged before she lost her head and ran off with Red.

He wiped grease on his overalls, and grinned. "Gosh, Luke, you look like you'd seen a ghost."

I shook my head. "No such luck. He was in the flesh. Red Martin."

His face stiffened and a new look entered his eyes—a cold, wary look.

"What's Red doing around here?"

"I think he has some kind of shake-down in mind," I said. "He heard about

Nina filing for the divorce, and he was over, threatening to make trouble in court."

He studied the tops of his boots. "Nina?" he said at last. "Nina saw him?"

"No. She's in town, runing some errands. I thought maybe you'd drive me in to meet her, but I see you're busy."

"Yes," he said absently. "Putting in new rings. I'll have it back together again though inside an hour, if you want to wait."

"No," I said. "I'll walk. It's only two miles, and I'd like to be with her when she finds out. Red's probably hunting for her himself, by now. Don't promise him anything, Joe, if he stops by here. We'll get the divorce for her some way, without that."

He looked up, and his eyes seemed bleak and tired.

"Are you sure she wants a divorce, Luke?" he said.

I stared at him. "Are you crazy? How long would it take you to cut the rope, if you found there was a snake at the other end?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, Luke. I don't know. Women are funny sometimes, about men like Red. You know how she keeps putting me off, even now."

It was my turn to study my shoes. "She's been hurt, Joe," I said. "Terribly hurt. She's not sure if it's safe to trust a man again. But she will be, Joe, if we give her a little more time. She'll pull through okay, with your help."

He nodded. "I hope so." But he didn't sound hopeful about it.

I borrowed a spare flashlight from him and walked on down the road.

I didn't find Nina in town. Bill Grady, the station master, said he had seen her about six when he came back from dinner, and she looked like she was ready to leave town, then.

"You tell her about Red?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Didn't figure that was none of my business at all, Luke."

I thanked him and walked on down the street, trying to think of some way I might have missed her on the road. I tried the drug store, both filling stations, and the movie house, but none of them had seen her since dark.

TWICE I phoned home and got no response. So I killed half an hour in the back room of Travers' pool hall, watching the nickel crap game there, and then I started back up the road again. It wasn't really late yet, not much after nine, and I figured Nina must have stopped off at some neighbor's along the way, and that's how I had missed her.

I had just passed the entrance to Joe Lake's drive when the flashlight beam caught on something in the ditch beside me, and I looked down and saw Red Martin's body. He was lying on his side, with one hand outstretched, and from the crazy way his legs trailed out behind him, I knew right away that he had been hit by a car.

But it wasn't a car that had killed him. I realized that, when I was able to think clear. The car might have knocked him into the ditch and broken his legs, but he had been able to drag himself two or three feet after that.

And then someone, probably the car's driver, had come back and dropped a fifty-pound rock on his skull. The rock was lying beside his crushed head, still wet with his blood, and you could see where it had been picked up at the edge of the ditch.

I knelt and lifted his wrist mechanically. It was already cool. Something gleamed from the dirt beneath his spread fingers, and I looked down and saw the tiny gold dice there, the three diamond spots on their tops winking up at me eerily.

Three, I thought. A mighty tough point to make. It looked like Red Martin's luck had run out at last. . . .

Joe Lake was in his pajamas when he answered my knock. His eyes held that bleak, tired look when I finished my story. He promised to call Dode Pfeffer, the sheriff, while I ran up to my place and tried to locate Nina.

The house was dark when I got there. But I saw that the Ford was back in the shed, and I decided she had driven past while I was at Joe's, and had gone to bed already. Red's body, down there in the ditch, wouldn't be noticeable from a car.

She was in bed, all right, and so fast asleep that I couldn't rouse her. Then I noticed the sleeping tablet bottle on the dresser, and for a while I forgot all about Red's death. I was too busy phoning

ing Doc Ransom to bring a stomach pump, and trying to force an emetic down Nina until he got there.

He arrived in less than fifteen minutes, pumped the stuff out of her in plenty of time. She had taken only four or five pills anyway, he said. She was already snapping out of it again, when Pfeffer and Joe came in from viewing the body of Red Martin.

Pfeffer took the scene in at a glance and turned to me, his gray eyes thoughtful. His silver hair was uncombed—Joe's call had got him out of bed—and his broad face was lined and somber. He smoked a corncob pipe, but so does MacArthur. Dode was no hick.

"Better tell us about it, Luke," he said softly.

I described how I had found the body. Then Syme Mathews, his chief deputy came in.

"Yep," he said, avoiding my eyes. "That tire mark matches, all right. It's the same as the left front tread on Luke's Ford."

I eyed him blankly. "What tire mark? There wasn't any tire mark where I found him."

Pfeffer sighed. We had been friends ever since we were kids together, and I knew the regret in his voice was genuine.

"It was down the road a piece from the body," he said. "About at the point of impact, I'd say. . . . Well, Luke, I guess you're elected. The whole country knows how you felt about Red."

My legs were shaky with relief. So long as it was me they suspected, not Nina, it was all right with me. But Joe was staring at him incredulously.

"You're crazy, Dode! It couldn't have been Luke! He didn't even have the Ford tonight."

Then he noticed my face and the words died in his throat while a terrible sickness seemed to slide into his eyes. He groaned.

I would have slugged him right then if I thought it would do any good. But it wouldn't have. The damage was already done. Every eye in the room swung to Nina's face on the pillow.

She was lying there with her hazel eyes closed, and her face drawn and white in its frame of chestnut curls. For a moment it looked as though she hadn't heard. Then her lips twitched

slightly, and words came slow and distinct:

"It was me, of course. Who had a better reason? Why else do you think I'd have taken all those pills?"

AFTER she had dressed and they had taken her down to the courthouse, Joe Lake turned to me miserably.

"I'd cut out my tongue if it would help any, Luke," he said. "But I never thought. . . . All I could think of at the time was that they were trying to pin it on you, and you hadn't done it."

I think I still hated him for what he had done. But I could see, of course, that it wasn't really his fault.

"If you really knew Nina," I said, "you'd stop blaming yourself. You'd know that she would have confessed, anyway. . . ."

The inquest was just a formality. Nina didn't appear at all. Dode Pfeffer merely indicating that she would plead not guilty as the law demanded in such cases. Dode testified that Red's broken legs showed he had been struck from in front by a car, while walking down the right side of the road; that he'd died from a blow on the head a few seconds later, making it first degree homicide.

Syme Mathews testified that the tire mark found at the edge of the ditch matched a tread on our Ford; and Doc Ransom, who was also deputy coroner, said that death had occurred between five and nine p. m. That was as close as he cared to say under the circumstances, and the exact time didn't matter.

Spec Martin narrowed it down a little when he told how Red hadn't left the house to walk down to Joe's place till almost seven. He seemed terribly hurt and bewildered, as though he couldn't understand anyone wanting to murder Red, especially anyone who'd been as close to him as Nina. His bad eye kept watering on the stand, and he had to bite his lip to hold back the tears.

The verdict of course was automatic, the jury recommending that Nina be held to answer as charged.

Katherine Grady drove over to see me early that evening. She was a big woman with hennaed hair and a gushy voice, a woman who lived on gossip like a vulture does on carrion. Why Nina ever bothered to be nice to her at

all, I'll never know.

"Poor dear," she cooed. "Somehow I just can't help feeling it's all my fault. But I never dreamed, when I told her what Red said down at the station, that she'd take it seriously enough to—to do what she did."

"And what *did* Red say, Katherine?" I asked.

"Why, nothing, really. Just that if she went ahead with her plan to divorce him, he'd make her name a bad word on every tongue in the county."

"You heard him say it?"

"Why, no. But Bill told me, when he came home to dinner."

"And you had no more sense than to repeat it to her?"

Her fat face reddened and her cheeks puffed out like a catfish.

"I considered it my duty to warn her, Luke Crandall!"

I brushed it aside. My thoughts had begun to churn.

"Wait a minute. You mean Nina stopped by your place *after* Bill went back to the station? On her way home?"

"Of course! She wanted to see how those chicks you sold me were getting along."

I grabbed my hat and hustled her out the door, mumbling something about a previous appointment. Then I jumped into the Ford and headed for town.

I knew now why I had missed Nina on the road last night. I had taken the most direct route from town, the one I supposed that she would take, too. Only she hadn't. She had stopped by the Gradys' on the way home, and the Gradys lived on the river road, two miles east. So afterwards, rather than circle back through town, she had merely driven on north and returned by the Martin cutoff, approaching our place from the north instead of the south.

That way, she wouldn't pass Joe Lake's place at all, wouldn't come within five hundred yards of where Red was killed!

I made Dode Pfeffer let me into her cell and finally dragged the story out of her, when we were alone. How she had returned from Katherine's to find me gone, and had taken the sleeping pills to deaden the shock of Katherine's news—not trying to commit suicide, just trying to quiet her nerves and insure a good night's sleep.

The ringing of the phone had roused her a few minutes later—the pills hadn't yet taken full effect—and she thought she heard someone out in the shed with the Ford. She had supposed of course that it was me, that I'd returned from wherever I had been earlier and was taking the Ford out to run into town or something. The phone had stopped ringing then, and she had gone back to sleep.

SHE hadn't known about Red's death at all till she heard us discussing it in her room. Then, when Syme Mathews mentioned the tire mark, she had been certain that I was the killer, that I'd come upon Red on the road and run him down. That's why she had confessed—to save me—when Joe's apparent alibi for me gave her the chance.

I shook my head bleakly. "It wasn't me you heard out in the shed, Nina," I said. "It was me on the phone, calling from town to see if you'd got home."

"But Daddy, that tire mark!"

"Yes," I said heavily. "The tire mark. . . . Can you tell me any more about this sound you heard, out in the shed?"

She closed her eyes, trying to remember. She looked like a little girl again, that way.

"I don't know. Just some little sound. Like a door being opened, the squeak of a rusty hinge."

"But the shed doesn't have any doors," I said. "Could it have been the sound of a wrench on a rusty lug bolt? A jack being lowered? Something like that?"

Her eyes clouded uncertainly. "Maybe. I was already nine-tenths asleep."

When I left Nina, Pfeffer was still in his office up front. I stopped there a moment on my way out.

"Dode," I said, "she didn't do it. She only confessed because she thought I did."

He drew audibly on his corn-cob. "I wish I could believe that, Luke," he said. "But I can't just ignore the evidence."

"You mean that tire mark."

He nodded.

"What would you say, Dode," I went on, "if I told you that tire mark was a plant? That the killer put it there *after* he killed Red, to draw suspicion away from himself?"

He studied me thoughtfully. "If we could prove that, Luke, I'd turn her

loose in a minute. But I don't see how we can. Got anything definite to go on?"

I bit my lip. "No," I said at last. "Nothing definite."

But I was thinking that Red had been headed for Joe Lake's the night he died, that he had been killed only a stone's throw from Joe's drive. Suppose he had reached Joe's, and tried to put the bite on him, as he had me, earlier? And suppose that after he left, Joe had jumped into his car and followed him and run him down? Joe's car hadn't been working earlier that evening. But he could easily have fixed it before Red arrived.

And afterwards, panicky that the murder might be pinned on him, he could easily have planted that tire mark. Our house was in plain sight of his. He could have seen the light go on in Nina's room when she returned. That would tell him the Ford was back in the shed. And he knew I was downtown, looking for her.

All he had to do was wait till her light went out again, till he figured she was asleep, then sneak over there, take the right wheel off the Ford, roll it down to make the mark, then replace it. A born mechanic like Joe could do it quickly and quietly. If Nina did hear anything, she would think it was me. And if she guessed the truth, later, what could she prove?

In a way, it was hard to imagine Joe framing Nina. And in another way, it wasn't hard at all. She had run out on him once with Red; and she still refused to promise him anything definite, just kept him dangling, even now that she planned a divorce. A thing like that could turn any man's love to hatred, if he didn't understand the true reason for it.

I said good-by to Dode and walked aimlessly down the street, my thoughts bitter, trying to figure some way to flush Joe Lake into the open. In front of the depot I met Spec Martin and spoke mechanically, but he just turned his bad eye to me and kept on going. He was lugging a scuffed brown valise and I realized it was Red's. Red must have left it there when he walked out to my place that night.

The click of pool balls drifted through Travers' open door, and I turned in to

have a beer. The usual crap game was going on in the back room. I stood there a moment, hearing the chant of the players, and all at once everything was clear.

I thought of the dice that had been in Red Martin's hand when he died—the tiny gold dice that he had placed carefully on the ground beneath his spread fingers, even as the rock descended to crush out his life. And I knew then what I had to do—knew that there wasn't a moment to lose. . . .

PFEFFER'S office was dark when I reached the courthouse. He had gone home, and there wasn't time to call him now. I jumped into my Ford and started out, pressing the gas pedal to the floor board all the way up the hill. Far ahead as I drove I could see the red eye of the tail-light on Spec Martin's flivver.

He was already into his ramshackle old house when I got there. I barged in without knocking, found him crouched above Red's open valise. He held a snapshot clutched in one scrawny fist, and the look in his crossed eyes was the same look I'd once seen in the eyes of a cornered bobcat.

"What's the idea, bustin' in here this way?" he demanded.

"Sorry, Spec," I said. "But I think the sheriff would like to see that."

"You're crazy! This is Red's stuff! The sheriff found the baggage check in his pocket after he was killed, and turned it over to me tonight himself!"

"He didn't know then what I know now." I took a step forward. "Better hand it over, Spec."

He didn't hand it over. A fire was already burning in the stove, and he turned suddenly and bolted toward it. I lunged forward and brought him down a yard short of the fire. Even then his hand shot out, darting the crumpled print toward the open fire door. It struck the rim and seemed to poise there a moment, then dropped undamaged to the floor. After that he was whimpering and snuffling at my feet while I unwadded the picture and looked at it.

It showed a man holding a bottle to another man's lips, forcing liquor down him after he had already passed out. The man with the bottle was Spec; the

unconscious man, his uncle who had "drunk himself to death" two years before.

"Red made me do it!" he whined. "He said Uncle Brandy'd die of a brain hemorrhage sooner or later anyway, and it wouldn't hurt nothing to hurry the process a little, before he drank up all the money he had in the bank. He told me to do it while he watched the door, and afterwards we'd split up the money between us."

I nodded. "Instead, he snapped this picture of you, then took all the money himself. He used it as his stake when he ran off with Nina. That's why you killed him, when you found him walking down the road to Joe's from my place that evening. You thought he'd come back to blackmail you again."

"He was already dead in the ditch when I met you on that same road a few minutes later. I'd have seen him then but I was walking on the left side of the road and the ditch was deep. I thought he had gone home when he left my place, but he hadn't. He was still looking for Nina, and he thought she might be at Joe's."

"So you killed him—and I didn't find him till I came back from town three hours later. And meanwhile, you'd seen Nina pass your house in the Ford on her way home, and you got the idea of framing her for the murder. So you sneaked down there, waited till the house was dark, then took a wheel off the Ford and made that tire mark. You

knew if Red's body had already been discovered, it wouldn't still be lying there in the ditch. . . ."

With the picture to go on, it was no trick to get a formal confession out of Spec. Afterwards, Pfeffer turned to me.

"What I don't see," he said, "is how you happened to suspect him in the first place."

I shook my head. "Red himself tipped me off, if I'd only had sense enough to see it earlier."

"Red! How?"

"With those dice in his hand. After Spec deliberately ran him down with the flivver, he must have known what was coming next. He couldn't defend himself, with those broken legs. But maybe he could finger his killer, for later. That's where the dice came in."

He knocked out his pipe. "I still don't get it. Joe would have been a lot more logical choice."

"Oh, it couldn't have been Joe. Or Nina, either. Dode, what's the crap-shooter's term for the point of four?"

"Why, Joe. Little Joe."

"And the point of nine?"

"Nina from Carolina. But—"

"But those dice weren't turned to four or nine. They were turned to three. And what's slang for the point of three?"

His jaw unhinged and the pipe dropped into his lap.

"Jehoshaphat! Cockeyes! Three is Cockeyes!"



THREE TOP-FLIGHT DETECTIVE NOVELS

SHE'LL BE DEAD BY MORNING by Dana Chambers, THE BLACK

GOATEE by Constance & Gwenth Little and THE TWIN

KILLING by George Bagby featured in the

Summer Issue of TRIPLE DETECTIVE—196 pages, only 25c

A'HUNTING WE



CHAPTER I

Man Dead

THREE distinctly different men and a tall, long-limbed woman relaxed in the comfortable chairs in the newly decorated library of the ancient red-stone home atop the highest hill in Delano. The maid had departed, taking with her empty glasses, and now each of

the four held a fresh highball.

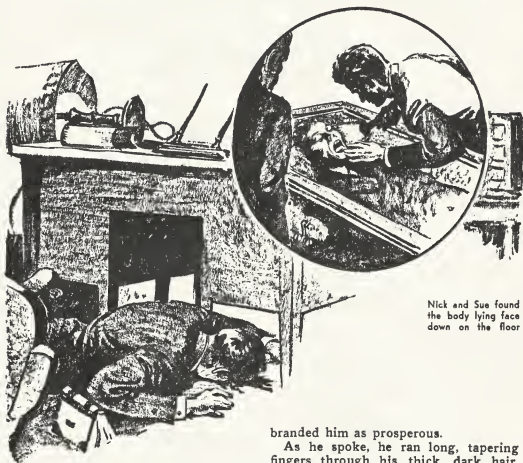
Tall, lean Everett Saunders, whose home it was, rose, proposed a toast. He looked younger than his forty-five years,

WILL GO

A NICK AND SUE BURNEY NOVELET BY

EDWARD CHURCHILL

*When this newspaperman and his lady turn sleuths,
they take the trail of a deadly foe more cunning
than any denizen of the wild!*



Nick and Sue found
the body lying face
down on the floor

firm and athletic. His hair was graying at the temples, and his clear gray eyes gave him a look of intelligence. His rough tweed suit, excellently tailored,

branded him as prosperous.

As he spoke, he ran long, tapering fingers through his thick, dark hair, smiled at the others. The smile, like the man, was easy, confident, self-assured. It took away the beginnings of lines around his thin lips, softened the angles of a rather long face.

"Let's drink, my good brothers," he

said to the other two men, "to the happiness of my bride-to-be, Elsa."

John and Blake Saunders, notable in contrast to their wealthy brother, rose.

John Saunders, who was plump and looked bookish, was nearing forty, and was short, with a moonish face and near-sighted, popping eyes framed by a pince nez attached to a thin black ribbon. His nose was short, compared to his older brother's sharp acquisitive one. His clothing was dark, more formally cut. He was perhaps six inches shorter than Everett. Had he been two inches taller, he would have been characterized as pompous.

Blake Saunders, the dentist, the youngest, had reached his thirties only the year before, and it was difficult to realize that he had the same origins as his two brothers. While Everett had dark hair and John was definitely becoming bald, Blake was blond. Where Everett had a look of austerity and John one of pomposity, Blake was of the debonair, man-about-town type. His cheeks were rosy, his blue eyes had a twinkle. His face was neither long like Everett's nor round like John's—it was an in-between face, with firm, even features. His build was slight, but his shoulders were broad and he had the look of a tennis player.

BOTH men touched their glasses with tall Everett's.

"To Elsa!" they exclaimed, and beamed down on the willowy woman who lounged easily in an occasional chair and returned their words with a full-lipped smile. Elsa Manning had the bloom of the mid-twenties.

"And to your marriage, Everett," Blake Saunders added. "May it last forever."

"I can promise you it will," Elsa Manning said, in a low, throaty voice.

She brushed raven hair back from her high, smooth forehead and gave her fiancé an adoring look. Her large, dark eyes, arched brows, and exquisite coloring made people call her beautiful. She rose with feline grace, revealing a figure alluringly contoured, and went to Everett Saunders, putting her arm about him.

"Let's drink!" she exclaimed, and followed her own suggestion.

So did the three men.

Then short and stocky John Saunders

peered at his wristwatch and made a judicial announcement.

"This is my nightcap," he said, as if the world was waiting for his words. "I must be in federal court early tomorrow, with a clear head, to defend Blaisdell." He adjusted his pince nez, looked up at his older brother. "Everett, I shall be expecting you at my office promptly at five tomorrow. We'll—ah—close up that little matter."

"I'll be there, John," said Everett.

John set aside his glass, walked out into the high-ceilinged hall. Everett followed him, helped him on with his light topcoat. John picked up his briefcase, stepped into the vestibule and opened the door, October blowing in its chill wind. He paused, turned back.

"Don't worry, Everett," he said in a low voice. "I think you're doing the right thing."

Everett Saunders chuckled. "I worry? Never."

With a swift good night the plump attorney slipped through the door into the night. Everett Saunders returned to the library.

"I'll be running along now, Everett," Blake said. He glanced around the room. "I certainly like the way you've fixed up the ancestral barn for Elsa. It really looks livable—and she'll love it."

"Speaking of getting things fixed up—Gordon gave me that complete physical this afternoon, Blake. I'm in as good condition as a twenty year old. As soon as we're married we can start our trip around the world knowing that I'm shipshape." He looked at Elsa. "Nothing will spoil that, will it, darling?"

"No, my dear. Won't it be wonderful! Think of it—Europe, Asia, Africa, the war ruins, antiques, and world famous places. I've always wanted to see the Taj Mahal."

"And you will."

Blake Saunders drained the contents of his glass, put it down. "It's wonderful, Everett, to be able to retire at forty-five, just as you said you would twenty years ago." He looked from his brother to Elsa.

"May I see you home?" he asked. He looked back at his brother. "You'll trust me, won't you?" There was laughter at his lip corners.

Everett slapped his back. "Why not? You're with her all day."

"And I'm a very good dental assistant, too, am I not, Blake?" Elsa asked.

"It's going to be hard to let you go, my dear. I think you're the reason for half my practice."

He escorted her into the reception hall. Everett helped her slip into the light fur coat he had bought her as a pre-nuptial present. They put their arms around each other, embraced and kissed.

"Hey!" exclaimed Blake, "break it up will you? You're not in the movies."

"Elsa ought to be," said Everett, loath to release her. He lifted her chin, brushed her lips lightly. "Only three more days, darling."

"Only three," Elsa agreed. "Then it's forever."

"And don't forget our date," Blake cautioned Everett.

"I won't," Everett promised.

Elsa Manning slipped out the front door with Blake following, giving a good night grin to his brother. Everett watched them cross the wide porch, go to the car which sleekly hugged the long, winding driveway through the grounds. Then he closed the door, tested it to be sure it was locked, and went upstairs, whistling softly. He was still whistling when he reached the third floor, turned down the hall and went into his room. He carefully locked the door, left the key in it, and prepared for bed.

THE battered Ford pick-up carried Nick and Sue Burney, free of their duties on the Las Verdes *Sentinel*, northward. Sue, who was driving, turned her round, smiling face from the highway and looked at her tall, thin husband, slouched contentedly beside her.

"Isn't it wonderful to be away from the grind?" she asked. "I thought we'd never be on the loose. But we've two weeks ahead of us now, even if we didn't make it until October."

"I'm glad we brought the pick-up," Burney said. "It'll be handy to bring back those deer."

Sue was wearing flat-heeled sandals with rope soles, a pair of well-cut slacks which comfortably fitted her boyish form, a blue and white striped blouse and a suede jacket. Her almost black hair, as usual, was in wild disorder. Her husband was more formally attired in a

brown business suit. His dark hair was neatly combed and his rather long face was shaved carefully.

"I can't see why you're so dressed up," Sue said. "You'd be more comfortable in those old breeches and boots. Do you plan making business calls on the deer—or is this a hunting expedition?"

"You forget, my love, that just over the hill lies Delano, scene of my first journalistic triumphs. In the city is the *Delano Journal*, and in the *Journal* office is Charlie Smith, the guy who gave me my first editorial job and taught me to become the colossal reporter-sleuth that I am. His sterling product can't look like a bum."

She glared at him. "Nick Burney, if you think I'm going to spend one minute in a newspaper office on this trip, you're crazy. Honestly, if you went in for a good cry, printer's ink would run down your cheeks."

Burney reached over, chucked her under the chin. "Come, my pet," he said. "The life's interesting."

"Interesting? For twenty-four hours a day, nothing could be interesting. I should have stayed an X-ray technician. Clean work. Short hours. Nice surroundings."

The truck clattered by a sign which stated:

DELANO
City Limits
Pop. 91,725

Sue slowed. "You follow this street to Main and turn right," Burney said. "You can't miss the *Journal* building. We'll only stop for five minutes. I want you to meet Charlie Smith — grandest editor in the world."

Sue Burney said nothing. She just clamped her jaws tightly together and glared at the pavement ahead. Five minutes later she was parking.

They got out the pick-up, went inside the *Journal* building and he escorted her up a flight of stairs. They entered an office on which was printed "Managing Editor." A stout, short man with twinkling blue eyes and sparse blond hair looked up from his desk, his wide mouth first set in surprise and then turning into grin.

"Nick Burney!" he exclaimed, jumping to his feet. "It's been five years—"

The men shook hands. Burney introduced Sue.

"A new, interesting, and at times amazing type of wife," Burney said. "How's about grabbing your hat and having a bite? It's after noon."

Charlie Smith shook his head. "Too busy," he said, sadly. "A friend of mine—Everett Saunders, the real estate operator—was found dead in his room in the old Saunders place this morning."

"What?" exclaimed Burney. "Why he was playing championship golf when I left here!"

"And he was in excellent health up to last night," Smith said. "That's why we're working on every phase of the case."

CHAPTER II

Dark Mystery



BURNEY let the idea sink in. "What killed him? he asked then.

"Henry Gordon, his personal physician, said he didn't have any idea. Said it might be anything from a heart attack to acute indigestion. But Davis, the medical examiner, performed an

autopsy and has positive evidence that he died of nicotine poisoning. What's so odd is that that stuff kills in minutes, or even seconds. Nobody couldn't get to him to administer such a fast-acting poison. The door to his room on the third floor was locked."

Sue Burney's face clouded as she saw the eager, excited expression grow on her husband's features. She reached out, grabbed his hand and gave it a tug.

"Come on, bloodhound—we're getting out of here. We're going deer hunting!"

Burney grinned at her, shook off her grip, and looked at Smith.

"Sue always wants to play," he explained. "Go on—this fascinates me."

"I'm glad I've met you, Mr. Smith," Sue interposed. "Nick's told me how wonderful you've been to him." She glanced at her wristwatch and then at her husband. "I'll give you five minutes. I'll be in the truck. We'll have a longer visit on the way back, Mr. Smith. We'll have venison together."

Smith nodded. "You ought to stick around and listen now, though. They found Saunders in his pajamas, lying on the floor, with a wallet he had taken from his coat open and a bunch of business cards and papers scattered around. The police not only examined the lock on his door, but the ground beneath the windows. There were no marks which indicated the use of a ladder, and it would have had to be more than thirty feet long and too heavy for one man to handle to reach the third floor. The side of the building is covered with ivy of a delicate type and it's not been disturbed."

A light kindled in Sue's eyes. "Couldn't a murderer have possibly lowered himself from the roof?"

Burney winked at Smith, who answered her. "Impossible, my dear. The roof is of slate, slippery and steep. It has an eave which overhangs several feet. Police Commissioner Morgan had a man try to get in that way. He couldn't do it."

"What's nicotine poisoning?" Sue asked.

"Nicotine is an oil. In pure form a single drop would be fatal."

"That's an odd way to commit suicide," Burney said.

"But Everett didn't commit suicide," Smith told him. "The fellow was worth a couple of millions. He was going to marry a beautiful brunette dish who looks like a Greek goddess. He was about to clean up the last of his business affairs and take a trip around the world, an ambition he'd had for twenty years. His physician, Dr. Henry Gordon, says that he was in perfect physical condition. Why would he kill himself?"

"It sounds like murder to me," Sue said. "We ought to go see Dr. Gordon. Maybe he's concealing something."

"The police photographer has a bunch of prints of the body you might like to look at first," Smith told her.

"We'll register at the Mason and have a look at the house," Burney said. "Come on, Sue."

Sue suddenly came out of her trance. "Stuck again!" she exclaimed. "Oh, well—murderers are more interesting than deer, anyway."

THE big, old redstone mansion which stood high on the hill overlooking

the city of Delano, seemed strangely out of character with the informal pick-up standing in its driveway. Beyond the mansion great, green lawns sloped beneath trees which were now covered with yellowing leaves.

Nick and Sue Burney stood on the mansion's porch. Burney pressed the bell button, at the same time eyeing a car which stood under the port-cochere at the end of the vast veranda. From within the house came the faint sound of chimes. The door opened, and Burney and Sue found themselves facing a man Burney recognized as Blake Saunders, the dentist. Saunders looked at Burney inquiringly, and as if not welcoming the intrusion.

Burney introduced himself and his wife as from the *Journal*. "You're Blake Saunders," he said.

The dentist smiled, then. "That's right. I remember you, Burney. Cleaned up those department store murders here a few years ago, didn't you?"

"I did. And Charlie Smith has asked me to work on this one for him. We'd like to see the room where your brother died."

A large, buck-toothed woman in a maid's uniform showed up behind Blake Saunders. He turned.

"Linda," he said, "show Mr. and Mrs. Burney to my brother's room." He said to Burney, "The police have picked it over pretty thoroughly. I don't think you'll find much."

"I like to get this thing cleaned up as soon as possible," Blake Saunders called after them. "There's some talk of murder, but that's absurd. Everett was a friend to everyone. The police can't figure out how anyone could have got into his room, anyway."

The maid escorted the Burneys to the third floor.

"You found the body?" Burney asked her on the way up.

"Yes and no," she said. "I've served the master for years. Each morning, at seven, I brung him up a pot of coffee. Each time he come to the door for it when I knocked, unlocked it. The last time I knocked, I got a feeling something was wrong and I pounded. Then I yelled. I finally called up the police, as even the likes of me couldn't break down that big locked door."

"The key was in the door?"

"It was. On the inside. I looked into the keyhole and it was dark. I got a screwdriver, tried to force it out. I couldn't."

They were at the door now, and Burney saw that a panel had been smashed so that a hand could reach inside and turn the key. He stepped into the room, followed by Sue and Linda. Linda pointed to the floor, not far from the bed.

"He was all sprawled out," she said. "I heard the coroner say later he must have died about two o'clock, judging from the heat of his body."

"Did you hear any sounds during the night?" Burney asked.

"No, sir. I live on the second floor back. Too far to hear."

Burney walked to the windows, raised them, looked down at the ivy. Then he looked up at the roof. The ivy was undamaged, as Smith had said. Sue looked, too.

"A monkey couldn't have swung in from the roof," she remarked.

"What about the wallet, and those business cards that were scattered around?" Burney asked Linda.

"Police took them, sir. All the master's personal effects."

"Thank you. Now we'll go back downstairs."

The maid led the way, and when they reached the first floor, Burney asked, "Where's Blake Saunders?"

"In there."

LINDA was pointing toward the library. Burney went to the room and stuck his head in. Saunders was sitting in a chair. On a divan across from him was a tall woman with raven black hair and tear-stained cheeks.

Blake Saunders rose. "Did you find anything, Burney?"

"I'm afraid not."

"That's a shame." He turned to the woman on the divan and before he introduced her, Burney recognized her as Elsa Manning from Charlie Smith's description.

"Miss Manning was my brother's fiancée," Blake Saunders explained.

Elsa Manning eyed the Burneys coldly, resentfully.

"I'd like to ask you a few questions," Burney said to the dentist. "Perhaps Miss Manning—"

The beautiful girl's eyes suddenly ignited. "Haven't we had enough of this intrusion?" she said. "First the police, and then this—"

"Now, now," soothed Saunders. "They're trying to help."

"We don't need any help. Everett's dead, and nothing will bring him back. Why don't you tell these people to see your brother, John. He handles Everett's affairs."

"I think that would be a very good idea," Sue said, easily. "Come, Nick."

Linda appeared as if by magic at that moment and showed them to the door.

"Looks like a perfect job," Sue said, as she and Burney walked down the drive to the pick-up.

"Could be," Burney agreed.

They got into the car, and Burney had his wife drive to police headquarters. When they reached the tall, gray-stone building, they went to the police commissioner's office. Commissioner Morgan met them halfway across his office, his hand outstretched.

"Nick Burney!" he exclaimed. "Glad to see you!" He turned to another man in the office. "Nick, you remember Davis, our medical examiner."

The men shook hands and Burney introduced his wife. "She works with me," he explained. "And we're both working on the Saunders case for Charlie Smith."

Morgan's face clouded as he motioned them to chairs.

"That's a tough case," he said. "It doesn't make sense. If it's murder, somebody's accomplished the impossible."

"Was there any trace of oil of nicotine in the locked room?" Burney asked.

Davis shook a puzzled head. "No. Furthermore, there isn't an insecticide containing nicotine on the entire estate. We've talked to the gardener, old Ashbaugh, and he said he cleaned out all that stuff after growing season. We searched the ground beneath Saunders' windows and there's no kind of bottle or vial. We've analyzed every prescription in his bathroom. Not a sign of nicotine in any form."

"What about the body? How'd you run on to the nicotine?"

"Signs of irritation of mouth, esophagus and stomach," Davis said. "Intense gastro-enteritis. Blood was dark and

fluid. Congestion of the brain and internal viscera. We used Tunmann's test. Chemicals showed up violet red."

"That's enough for me. What about the pictures you shot, Morgan?"

The commissioner reached into a desk drawer, fished out some photographs and passed them over. There were views of the body from all angles. Burney studied them carefully. A small white object was clutched in the right hand of the corpse. He pointed it out to Morgan.

"Have you got that?"

Morgan handed over a piece of paper. On it was scrawled:

10-10-13

CHAPTER III

A Suspicious Theft



NICK BURNEY studied it. "May I have it?"

"If you give it back when you're through with it. That's another screwy angle of the case. Why should a man who has just committed suicide with nicotine oil from a vial that doesn't exist get out of his bed,

take his wallet out of his pocket, scatter cards around, and wind up with a piece of paper with a bunch of figures like that on it?"

"You've got me," Burney replied. He rose.

"Usual fingerprint check, Morgan?" he asked.

"All we found were his and Linda Gray's—she's the maid."

When they left, Nick had Sue drive to the Logan Building, three blocks away. Inside, he consulted the wall index. On the sixth floor, he steered his wife to a door marked, "John Saunders, attorney-at-law." A prim secretary looked up as they entered.

"I'm Nick Burney," the newspaperman said. "I'd like to see Mr. Saunders."

Burney found the pudgy attorney paler and older than he had been the last time he had seen him. John Saunders fingered his pince nez nervously.

"What can I do for you, Burney?" he

demanded. "I've not got much time. I shouldn't have come to the office at all today. You've heard what happened?"

"We're working on it," Burney replied, indicating his wife. "We wanted to ask if your brother had a will."

"I wouldn't want it in the papers at this time."

"Then it's off the record."

"Sit down." The lawyer indicated chairs, seated himself in a big leather swivel chair. "My brother, Everett, was a very charitable man," he said. "He always gave freely to worthy causes in Delano."

"I know," said Burney, trying to keep the impatience from his voice.

"Everett, at the time of his death, was about to sign a new will."

"What?" Burney exclaimed. "Who knew that?"

"As far as I know, I am the only one. My brother demanded that I keep it secret. But he may have told others. For instance, Miss Manning." He paused momentarily. "She was his fiancée, you know."

"That's right. And she was no doubt the reason for changing the will, to make sure that if anything happened to Everett, she'd receive a fair share."

"Correct in part." John Saunders played with his pince nez restlessly. "Six months ago Everett made a will which gave her approximately half his estate, amounting to more than a million. As his legal adviser, I pointed out that it was foolhardy. She might be marrying him for his money. Only three days ago he came to me and said he'd taken my advice—that he wanted a new will, limiting her to twenty-five thousand dollars. Then, if their marriage proved a success, say in three years, he was going to return to the original will, under which she would get half of his estate. He said he wasn't going to tell her this, however. A clever test of love."

"And supplying a beautiful motive for murder," Sue said. "If she knew that she was to inherit more than a million right now," Sue said, "and that she was going to be cut to pin money, she might try something."

"Is the new will signed yet?" Burney asked.

"No. He was coming in to sign it at five o'clock this afternoon."

SUE shot a meaning glance at her husband.

"What else is in the will?" Burney pressed.

"Everett, now that he was about to retire from active business, had become very sentimental about the city of Delano. He helped build it, make it what it is. But, at the same time, he pointed out to me that the city had made him. He wanted to prove his gratitude. He felt that I, as a lawyer, and Blake, as a successful dentist, were very well provided for. So he was reducing his legacy to us most appreciably. This money was to be diverted to such institutions as the Delano Hospital, the public library, Delano College and several churches."

"That gives everybody a motive," Sue reflected.

"Could I see the will?" Burney asked.

The lawyer pressed a button on his desk. The prim secretary stepped in, and he asked for Everett's file. The girl went out, came back a moment later, her eyes wide, her face pale.

"The will's gone!" she exclaimed. "I put it in Mr. Everett's file with a slip of paper noting the date. The paper's there, but the will is gone—all five copies!"

Burney leaped to his feet. John Saunders did likewise.

"Good heavens!" the lawyer explained. "I've got to see this for myself!"

Burney and Sue went with him. The file, Burney noticed, was in perfect order. He examined the lock, asked for a key. The girl looked questioningly at Saunders, got his nod and produced it. Burney tried it in the lock, opening and closing the drawer several times. The lock worked perfectly. There were no scratches on the filed drawer.

"Where do you keep this key?"

"In the safe, nights," the girl said, pointing to the heavy iron box against the wall. Burney looked it over. It hadn't been tampered with either. He went to the windows, looked at the locks on them, saw that there was no fire escape. Then he went to the door of the office, opened it, examined the lock and jamb.

John Saunders watched him. "I can't understand this," he murmured. "I simply can't."

"I can," said Burney. "At least, I can see possibilities."

The attorney's eyes turned cold behind his pince nez.

"Surely," Burney went on, "somebody knew that the will had been drawn up, but not yet signed. Before the latter event occurred, Everett Saunders must be put out of the way. The killer wasn't sure just when he'd have a chance to pull what he thought would be a job so carefully planned that the case would never be solved. He knew that by stealing all copies of a long and complicated will it would make necessary a lot more legal work and further delay the signing."

"And you think that I—" John Saunders' face grew livid and the veins leaped out on his forehead.

"You've said you think you're the only one who knew about the new will."

"You're insinuating, now, that I killed my brother?"

"I'm only using your own statement that you were the only one who knew of the changed will. I'm also pointing out now that while it is very clever to have things stolen from your files, if you wanted to pin it on someone else, you should've jimmied the lock on the filing drawer, and messed up the safe a bit. The fact that they were simply unlocked makes it look too much like an inside job."

John Saunders' flushed face went white. "This is ridiculous. It should be evident to anyone that I knew nothing about the theft. I was as surprised as you were."

"You're a very clever trial lawyer, Saunders," Nick Burney said. "I've seen you put on an act a good many times before." He turned to Sue. "Let's go, darling."

Death Strikes Again



HEN they had finished dinner at the hotel, Sue Burney said to her restless husband:

"I noticed there's a travel picture at the Orpheum. Something about wild life in North America. We might see a deer."

"You go see a deer, darling," he told Sue.

"I've got a call to make. I want to ask a couple of leading questions."

"Dr. Blake Saunders?"

"So you've taken to mind-reading."

"On second thought, Nick," she said, "I'll string along with you."

Nick gave Sue directions, and she drove their battered pick-up to a large apartment house in the residential district.

Blake Saunders, his athletic frame wrapped in a dressing gown, answered the door.

Burney noticed the open book on the end table beside the big easy chair—a detective story—as he and Sue stepped inside the modest apartment.

"Just relaxing tonight, and trying to get this tragedy out of my mind," Blake explained, as he saw Burney's glance. "How about a drink?"

"Make mine bourbon," Sue told him. "Bourbon and water."

Burney ordered the same and Blake Saunders disappeared into the small kitchen and came back with two glasses. "Aren't you drinking?" Sue asked him.

"Not tonight," Saunders said. "My brother, you know. I feel so terrible I might get potted—and a dentist's hands have to be steady. What have you found out?"

"Not much." Burney took a sip of the drink. "Just dropped in to ask you a few questions. Such as—do you have any occasion to use oil of nicotine in the dental business?"

The dentist smiled. "I'm afraid you're barking up the wrong tree, Burney. My only professional interest in poison concerns arsenic. I use it to de-vitalize teeth."

FOLLOW THE ADVENTURES OF
THE WORLD'S GREATEST SLEUTH
in

Our Companion Magazine

**THE PHANTOM
DETECTIVE**

NOW ON SALE

15¢ per copy at all Stands

"Did you know about your brother's plan to change his will?" Burney asked.

The dentist's eyes widened. "What plan?"

"He had drawn up, but hadn't signed, a new will, which cut down the legacies of your brother, John, his fiancée, Elsa Manning, and you to almost nothing. He was giving the bulk of his estate to charity."

"That's news to me," Blake Saunders said. "I didn't know a great deal about Everett's affairs. You see, I was away from here for several years, attending college and dental school, and since I've been back I've not been much concerned with them. I've a very successful practice, and it keeps me too busy to be bothered by outside interests."

"I understand, Saunders. By the way, Elsa Manning's your assistant, isn't she?"

"That's right. She has been for several years—ever since I entered practice here."

"I was thinking that possibly, in view of their approaching marriage, Everett might have told Miss Manning of his plans, and she, in an unguarded moment, might have confided in you."

"Miss Manning never confides in me. Our relationship is purely professional."

"Do you think it possible that your brother might have taken nicotine in capsule form—which later was released into his stomach when it dissolved?"

"I'm not a chemist. Why don't you ask Davis, the medical examiner, or some toxicologist?"

OUTSIDE as they got into the pickup, Sue yawned.

"Let's call it a day, Nick, darling," she said. "I can hardly keep my eyes open."

He directed her back to the hotel.

"Tomorrow I want you to start working on Elsa Manning," he said then. "Find out everything you can about her. I understand she lives alone in a small apartment on Summit Street. Blake Saunders has offices in the Dental Building. You might prowl around there and get into conversation with some of the other girls who work for dentists. She's probably talked about herself to them. Follow up any leads."

"I get it, Nick."

Burney alternately ran his hands

through his hair, scratched his head.

"Look, Sue," he said, just as she was pulling into the parking lot. "Let's give this one more shot tonight."

Sue sighed wearily as she braked. "What for?"

"I want to take a flier at Dr. Henry Gordon, who has a combined office and home." He glanced at his watch. "It's not quite nine, and he used to keep night hours. Probably still does."

"Why Gordon?"

"He used to go with Elsa Manning, I suddenly remember. Just when I left town to take that San Francisco job they were reported engaged. Maybe there's more to this than the will angle."

"Jealousy?" Sue asked.

"It's caused murder before. I don't like the way Gordon was so indefinite about the cause of Everett Saunders' death. Saunders had been to him the day before he died. Gordon knew his physical condition. It seems to me he'd be able to establish the cause of death more accurately."

"Right," said Sue. "And you make a crack to Blake Saunders about oil of nicotine being put into a capsule. Couldn't Gordon, realizing that he was losing all chance to win Elsa with the approaching marriage, have given Everett Saunders a single capsule to take at bedtime to relieve some light, temporary indisposition?"

"That's what's on my mind, baby."

As the truck rattled close to the two-story residence that was the physician's combination home and office, Burney was relieved to see a light on in the office.

At the door, Burney pressed a button beneath a small illuminated sign which read: "Night Bell."

The bell peeled loudly. The physician didn't appear, yet Burney was sure he could hear a low jumble of voices inside the place. He pressed the button again—more viciously and longer.

Above the sound of the bell he heard the explosion.

He stopped pressing and there was an eerie silence. The light in the physician's office went out.

"Give me the gun!" Burney said.

Sue snapped open her purse and passed him a .38 caliber service revolver. He heard the back door slam. Darting around the side of the house, he found

the gate into the alley open. He raced through it.

As he sprinted down the alley he heard the sound of an engine being ground to life, its roar as it sped away. By the time he reached the street to which the alley led, the vehicle had disappeared. Crestfallen, he turned back. As he rounded the front of the house he saw a figure crouched by the front door. It was his wife, and she was holding a jack handle from the truck in her hand. She straightened up as he approached.

"I was just going to get whoever it was if they came this way," she said.

HE tried the office door. It was locked. Together they went around to the rear of the house. The back door was unlocked and, gun in hand, with Sue following, he groped through kitchen, dining room, a laboratory, and an office, turning on lights as he went.

They found the body lying face down on the floor. Burney rolled it over. The face was horribly distorted by a bullet that had been fired at close range.

"It's what's left of Henry Gordon, all right," Burney said. "Don't call the police yet, dear. I want to look around."

He inspected the office and then went into the laboratory, leaving Sue to her own devices. In the physician's work-room he found mortars and pestles, bunsen burners, retorts, glass tubing and funnels, and other adjuncts of chemical experiment. In addition, there was a complete library on toxicology, chemistry and medical jurisprudence.

What fascinated him most, however, was the case of drugs of all kinds. The alkaloids and barbiturates were in locked cabinets. But in other cases he found row after row of all sorts of common drugs. He suddenly remembered that nicotine was an alkaloid.

With a pocket screwdriver he took the screws out of the hinges of one of the doors of the alkaloid case, and removed the door. Inside was the usual assortment of morphine, heroin, and other drugs of their type, plus many of the rarer forms, gelsemium, hydrastris—and nicotine.

Before touching the bottle, which was small and contained very little of the oil, Burney took out his handkerchief and covered it. Then he lifted it very

carefully, studied the place where it had rested, and put it back. Finally, he screwed the door on again.

Returning to the office, he found Sue down on her hands and knees. She looked up at him triumphantly and got to her feet, holding up two small pieces of film.

"Found them near Gordon's right hand," she said. "One was nearly under it and the other was right by the leg of the desk."

"Swell," said Burney. "Stick 'em in your purse."

He took out his handkerchief, threw it over the handle of the telephone, held it loosely while he dialed. He reported the killing to Commissioner Morgan on a special wire to his home and was told to stand by.

Morgan, two plainclothesmen and Davis, the medical examiner, arrived on the heels of two patrolmen in a prowler. Morgan's grim face was cloudy as he eyed Burney.

"I don't like this, Nick," he said. "You're up to your old tricks."

"What tricks?" asked Burney, innocently.

"Being practically on the scene of too many murders." Morgan shook an admonitory finger in his face. "Don't try to hold out."

He sent a detective into another room with Sue, and then asked Nick for his story.

Burney told of his arrival with Sue, the ringing of the doorbell, the sound of the shot, the futile race after the killer.

"Did you see whether it was a man or woman?" Morgan asked.

"I didn't see anyone at all."

Morgan turned to the remaining detective. "Go outside," he said, "and check for footprints."

He stepped out of the office, brought Sue in.

"I want your story," he said.

After several minutes of listening and questioning, Morgan seemed satisfied that the stories matched.

"May we go now?" Sue asked.

Morgan turned to Burney. "You haven't any idea of leaving town suddenly?"

"No, sir," said Burney.

"That's good. You're both upgraded yourselves to material witnesses. Drop

in tomorrow morning, Nick."

"Yes, sir."

"Goodnight."

"Goodnight," said Burney and Sue, and went out.

CHAPTER V

New Angles



AT A LATE breakfast—Sue had had more sleep than her husband because he had gone to the *Journal* office to write the story of the murder of Dr. Henry Gordon — Burney pored over the newspaper.

Sue jarred him from reading his own stuff by asking, "Nick, have you still got that paper with the numbers on it?"

He nodded, without looking up.

"Gimme! I've an idea."

He reached into his pocket, pulled out the slip, and passed it over to her. She put it in her purse. He noticed she had some films in the purse.

"What are those X-rays?"

"Pictures of teeth. Nice ones. Masculine. I got them at Dr. Gordon's."

"What in the world would they be doing in a doctor's office?"

"Simple, Sherlock. When people get overhauled, doctors have pictures of their teeth taken so they'll know if they're causing an infection in any other part of the body."

"Oh." Burney wiped up the last bit of fried egg with a piece of toast and devoured it. "You're going to follow through this morning—what's left of it —on Elsa Manning?"

"Don't I always, Nick?"

"Sometimes you go a little bit too far. Well, you'll probably have some running around to do. Take the pick-up. I'll walk to headquarters."

Burney reviewed the case in his mind after Sue had gone. Everett Saunders had been murdered by persons unknown when it seemed impossible, apparently, to murder him, for he'd been in a locked room. Elsa Manning, the two brothers — John Saunders, attorney, and Blake Saunders, dentist—were being practically cut out of his will. Each had a

motive, the ability to kill, but no opportunity, according to present evidence.

Dr. Henry Gordon, who had given Everett Saunders a general examination between three and five o'clock in the afternoon, less than twelve hours before his death, was in possession of oil of nicotine, used mainly in insecticides. He had been in love with Elsa Manning—and now he was dead.

Burney had learned the hour of examination from Dr. Gordon's appointment book. He had also found, he recollected, a self-written memo on a reminder pad which said: "Call John Saunders."

He walked into police headquarters, was shown into Commissioner Morgan's office. Morgan's current caller was Medical Examiner Davis. The men greeted each other in restrained fashion.

"Last night I noticed that Gordon had a pretty extensive laboratory for a physician," Burney said to Davis.

"That's right, Burney. Gordon was quite a man. He was not only a physician and surgeon, but he was an excellent chemist, whose experiments attracted wide attention in the medical field."

"Oh," said Burney.

"Not only that, but he was one of the few physicians who mixed his own prescriptions."

"This gets more and more interesting," Burney said.

"We found the oil of nicotine," Morgan told Burney.

"Did you find that it had been moved recently?" Burney asked.

"Why—no. Was it?" Morgan leaned back in his big leather chair, scratched his head and then pounced forward. "How'd you find that out?"

BURNEY grinned easily. "Took the screws out of the hinges and removed one of the doors to the alkaloid case."

"Why didn't you tell me that last night? I warned you, if you were holding out—"

"I didn't tell you for two reasons. The first was that you began getting tough. I thought maybe you'd forgotten I got into town at least eleven hours after Everett Saunders' death. Second, I knew you'd find it yourself, sooner or later." Burney turned to Davis. "You

evidently knew Gordon pretty well. Didn't he go with Elsa Manning for a while?"

"That's right. About two years ago." He suddenly sat bolt upright. "Say—Henry and this Manning girl had it out hot and heavy. It was over Everett Saunders."

"I'm getting it!" Morgan slammed his fist on the desk. "Gordon lose the girl to Everett Saunders. He broods. When he sees the wedding's set, and Saunders comes to him for a physical exam, he decides to bump Everett and thus win Elsa back. Somebody gets wise to the fact Gordon has killed Everett. This somebody kills Gordon. Revenge."

"Because the police couldn't solve the crime," Burney suggested.

"You're no seven-day wonder yourself," Morgan retorted.

"Of course, it might be possible to put the nicotine into a capsule," Burney said, "to be taken at bedtime. Sue suggested that. It would dissolve in Saunders' stomach and kill him. If anybody knew Gordon had done that—"

A buzzer sounded. Morgan picked up the phone, then held it out.

"For you, Burney."

It was Sue. When he hung up, he pulled out a piece of paper, wrote hurriedly on it and passed it to Morgan.

Morgan read aloud: "Please check attendance of one Elsa Manning at State Dental College in nineteen-thirty-nine. Did she know Blake Saunders, a senior, that year? Rush. Vital importance."

"Better teletype that to the Chicago police," Burney said when Morgan had finished.

Morgan pressed a buzzer and when his secretary came in gave him instructions.

"Where'd you get that tip-off about Elsa and Blake Saunders," Morgan asked Burney then.

"My little helpmate," Burney replied. "She got that way wringing society items and gossip from biddies. Sue says there's no question about Blake Saunders graduating that year. The gossip is that Elsa had just entered, and they fell in love."

"Good grief," exclaimed Morgan. "That knocks my theory cockeyed."

"No it doesn't," Burney said. "It just gives you something else to think about. Where's Everett Saunders' body?"

"Hannibal and Crump."

"I'm going over and have a look at it."

Burney got up, left the office, a puzzled Davis and a more puzzled Morgan.

"If my wife telephones," he told the secretary outside, "tell her to call me at Hannibal and Crump."

SUE BURNEY first called the dental offices of Blake Saunders. On being informed that Elsa Manning was home for the day, she consulted the telephone book and found her address. She drove the truck there. It was a modest four-story apartment building. She scanned the list of names and saw that Miss Manning lived in apartment 2-B. She jabbed the button of a fourth floor resident and when the lock buzzed she hiked to the second floor, found 2-B and knocked.

"Who is it?" asked Elsa Manning in her low, throaty voice.

"Miss Michael, from next door," she said, giving the name she had seen on the card in 2-C on the list at the entrance. "My phone's out of order. I'd like to use yours to report it."

Sue heard the slide of a chain lock inside and the door opened. She popped through it. She found herself facing Elsa Manning, clad in a peach-colored negligee. The woman stared at her for a moment, her eyes large with angry fear.

"You!" she exclaimed. "The newspaperwoman!"

"That's right," Sue said, easily.

"We're going to have a little talk."

At the same time her hand dipped into her purse and came out with the .38 revolver.

Elsa Manning turned into a statue.

"How well did you know Blake Saunders at State Dental School in Chicago?" Sue demanded. She watched the impact of the question.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"There's no use lying," Sue told her. "The Chicago police are working on it, and Commissioner Morgan may have the answers right now."

"You'll get nothing from me."

Sue laid her purse on the coffee table in front of the divan, and from it produced the piece of paper with the numbers "10-10-13" on it. She held it out.

"Did you ever see that before?"

Elsa Manning shook her head.

"You're lying," said Sue. "Look, Everett Saunders told you about the change in the will. He told you he was cutting your legacy away down because he wanted to test you—to see whether you were marrying him for his money or because you loved him."

Fright paled Elsa Manning's smooth skin. Sue decided to fire a long shot.

"John Saunders told the police you knew about the cut. That's a perfect motive for you to kill your husband-to-be."

Elsa Manning's body sagged onto the divan. "I don't know who killed him. But I didn't. They can't put me in jail. I won't go to jail."

"You will if you don't talk."

CHAPTER VI

Post Mortem



ELSA MANNING drew a deep breath. "All right. I can tell you about that card with the numbers on it. It's for an appointment, that's all. Everett was absent-minded, and he wrote his engagements down that way. There is nothing to it."

"Then he had a date at ten o'clock on the thirteenth of October—tomorrow?"

"That's right."

"With whom?"

"His brother, Blake, at Blake's office. Blake had found a cavity and had drilled it out, and was making an inlay. If Everett hadn't—died, he'd have been in Blake's office tomorrow morning having it put in."

Sue fished into her purse again with her left hand, took out the two X-rays, held them out to Elsa Manning.

"I understand that you develop all Dr. Saunders' X-rays. Do you recognize these?"

Elsa Manning held them up to the light.

"Why—they're of Everett's teeth. I know them because we took them only a few days ago. There were twelve X-rays. Where did you find these two?"

"Beside Dr. Henry Gordon's body."

"That's odd — yet understandable. Mrs.—"

"Burney. Why understandable."

"Dr. Gordon was giving Everett a general examination. He called me and asked me to send them over so he could find out if they were sound—not causing an infection in some other part of his body. Really, Mrs. Burney, this is all so silly. I think you'd better go now. I've given you all the information I have—and it doesn't mean a thing."

"One more question. Did Blake Saunders know that you had sent the X-rays to Dr. Gordon?"

"Blake—Dr. Saunders—was looking for them yesterday. He called me here at home, where I've been since Everett's death. I told him I'd sent them to Dr. Gordon. Now, please go. Everett's death has been a terrible shock, and this is just too much to stand."

Sue put the paper and the X-rays back into her purse, rose and backed to the door, revolver still in hand. She slipped out, closed the door and raced down the stairs, shoving the revolver into her purse as she did so. Outside, she drove downtown and parked in front of the Dental Building.

She went into the drug store on the first floor and into a telephone booth. She dialed for police headquarters and, after talking to Commissioner Morgan's secretary called Hannibal and Crump. In a moment, her husband answered.

"What have you been doing?" she asked.

"Wasting my time. I can't find a thing over here. The answer came to the wire I sent to Chicago. Blake Saunders and Elsa Manning knew each other all right. Teachers who remember them say they thought they were engaged."

"Never mind that. Take a look in the mouth of the corpse and then come back and tell me which tooth is drilled."

"Well, okay," was the hesitant reply. "What for?"

"Do as I tell you."

She heard Burney put the instrument down, walk away. In a few moments he came back.

"Upper right second molar," he reported. "What's it all about?"

"I can't tell you yet, for sure. I'll call you back."

"Go to the hotel, Sue. Wait for me

there. I hope I won't be long."

"Okay, darling."

She rang off, went outside, and held first one X-ray up to the paling afternoon sky and then the other. She gasped as she studied the second. What she saw drove everything else from her mind. She hurried back into the building, went to the eighth floor and to Blake Saunders' office. When she opened the door, a chime sounded. Saunders came from his office, and when he saw who it was, he smiled.

"Back again, eh?" he asked. "Don't tell me I've a new patient."

"I want to ask you about some X-rays, Doctor."

His eyebrows lifted in puzzled surprise. "Very well. Come in to my office where it's light."

HE turned and Sue followed him. She fished the films from her purse.

"Can you identify them?" she asked.

He held them up to the light. Then he turned his back to her, laid them on the glass top of his instrument cabinet, and began fumbling in a drawer.

"What are you doing, doctor?" Sue asked.

"Trying to find a magnifying glass. I want to study them more closely. I'll be with you in a moment."

Sue thought that moment was long.

He pushed the drawer shut, finally, picked up first one film and then the other and studied them. Then he laid them down. His back was still toward her.

"Ever see them before, doctor?" Sue asked.

"I'm sorry to say I haven't."

"They wouldn't belong to Everett Saunders, would they?"

She saw her question literally jar against his shoulders.

"I—wouldn't know."

"Doctor, why would you drill a perfectly healthy tooth to put an inlay in it when there was absolutely no reason to do so?"

She was reaching into her bag for her revolver when Blake Saunders suddenly whirled and she felt a vicious jab in her side—a sickening, sharp pain. At the same instant Saunders' hand closed over her wrist. A hypodermic needle fell to the floor. Sue fought to cling to the gun, but Saunders' strength was too much for her. He got it away from her,

covered her with it.

She tried to keep her voice calm. "What've you done to me, doctor?"

"Loaded you with enough morphine to kill three people, Mrs. Burney. You'll pass out shortly. You'll be dead in a very few hours and tonight I'll come up and get you, take your body out on the freight elevator and get rid of it."

He went to the door leading to the corridor and locked it.

Sue began to feel a strange exhilaration, as if she had had too much to drink, and knew that the morphine had started its deadly work.

"That was very clever, doctor," she said, "putting the oil of nicotine into your brother's tooth, probably making it into a paste form, and then capping it with something soft, or with thin cement."

"I used pure gutta-percha, Mrs. Burney," he told her. "I ran tests on my own teeth, and found out just about how long it would last."

"Of course," said Sue, feeling giddy, and fighting the sensation. She began praying for Nick. Where was he? The truck out front—maybe he'd see it. Maybe someone would come.

She began to sway on her feet.

"You'd better sit down," the dentist said, and led her to the divan, the weapon jammed against her side. She slumped onto it.

"You killed your brother because he was cutting you out of his will," Sue said, trying to get out the words without slurring them.

"It was a lot more than that," she heard, and the dentist sounded far away. "Ever since Dad died, when I was a kid, Everett's had everything—the house, the money, all the luxury. I even had to work my way through dental school, Mrs. Burney. I met Elsa there. I loved her. I talked her into coming here. Then he got her, too. You can understand my feelings, can't you?"

Sue wracked her brain for the question she wanted to ask, but it eluded her maddeningly. Then she hit it.

"You found out your brother, Everett, was going to sign a new will?"

"That's right. I heard him talking it over with Elsa. It was a dirty trick to play on her—and me."

"So you stole the will to give you time

to kill Everett?"

"Getting duplicates of the keys to the office of my brother, John, wasn't hard."

"You killed Dr. Gordon."

"I had to, Mrs. Burney. Elsa sent those X-rays to him, and he discovered that I'd drilled a good tooth. He knew about the oil of nicotine and he, like you, put two and two together. He called me over to his office just after you left me last night, asked enough questions, just as you did, to let me know he had evidence that I'd killed Everett."

Saunders' voice was trailing away now, fading, buzzing, in Sue's head.

"It's just as well I killed him anyway. He was another rival. Now I'll have a free path to Elsa. With her, and the money I should have had a long time ago, I'll make her very happy, and I'll—"

But Sue wasn't hearing any more. She was sinking down softly into a deep, dark pit to oblivion. . . .

NICK BURNEY, acting on the information which Sue had given him—her talk about the drilled tooth had given him the hunch—bent over Everett Saunders' open mouth and sniffed. There was the unmistakable odor of tobacco. He straightened, turned to Undertaker Hannibal, who was beside him.

"Got a flashlight?"

The undertaker produced one. Burney looked into the corpse's mouth, noted the tooth. The drilled hole was brown.

"Oil of nicotine," he said, half to himself, "is a colorless oil, but it turns brown on exposure to air for any length of time."

He hurried to the telephone and called Medical Examiner Davis. Davis arrived in five minutes. At Burney's insistence, he scraped the inside of the tooth, put the scrapings on a glass plate, and took it to his laboratory at police headquarters. Tunmann's test promptly produced a violet-red reaction.

"That's it!" Burney exclaimed, as he watched. "That's it!"

Swinging to the telephone, he dialed the hotel and asked for Sue.

"Mrs. Burney hasn't come in," the clerk told him.

"What?" exclaimed Burney. "Are you sure? I told her to—"

"Positive. The key's in the box and—"

Burney slammed down the instrument

and grabbed Davis.

"Quick!" he demanded. "Get hold of Commissioner Morgan. Have him notify every prowler car, every detective, every cop to find a green 1938 Ford pick-up, license number C-4151."

"What's up?"

"I told Sue to go to the hotel and she didn't. She had a lot of information—maybe the answer. I think I know what's happened. After you send out the general alarm, get Morgan and some cops and come to the Dental Building."

He darted from the laboratory and, outside, hailed a taxicab. He slipped the driver a bill to get to the Dental Building as a fast as possible. It was nearly dusk now.

The cab careened around corners, skidded to a hard-braked stop in front of the structure. Burney leaped out, looked up and down the curbing. Sight of the truck made his heart skip a beat. He raced inside the lobby, pushed his way into the crowded elevator, cursed inwardly when the operator kept stopping.

He darted out of the car on the eighth floor, started down the corridor. A figure was coming toward him in the darkening passageway, but he recognized it as Blake Saunders. He leaped forward as Saunders went for his coat pocket, swung hard. The blow caught Saunders on the point of his jaw. The dentist went down. Burney landed on top of him, and wrenched the revolver from his hand. His other hand twisted Saunders' arm.

"Where's my wife?" he demanded hoarsely. "Quick!"

"I don't know."

Burney twisted harder. "You're going to fry, Saunders. We know you killed your brother. Talk fast—"

"She's—in—my—office."

BURNEY got up, pulled Saunders to his feet and rammed the gun in his side.

"Get down the hall and open that door. What've you done to her?"

"Morphine—"

"I ought to kill you now."

Burney unlocked the door and prodded Saunders into the room. He saw Sue then, lying on the divan in the shadows, and he switched on the light. Ordering Saunders to get against the

wall and raise his hands, Burney sought Sue's pulse, as he kept the gun on the dentist.

He found its irregular beat and, as if sensing his presence, Sue stirred. Then he heard the commotion in the hall.

Commissioner Morgan came in, followed by Davis and two detectives. The detectives slapped manacles on Saunders at Morgan's orders.

"Sue," Burney said to the medical examiner, "she's full of morphine."

Davis quickly went to work. He gave her an injection, while Burney slapped her face, chafed her hands, pinched her.

"This'll make her sick," Davis said.

Sue was sick, very sick. Davis turned to one of the detectives.

"Go down to the drug store and get me some atropine—ten grains—and an urn of coffee."

Davis pulled Sue to her feet, but her knees buckled. Burney got on the other side and they walked her up and down the corridor. The detective came back and Davis let her sit down long enough to give her the atropine. The detectives left then, taking Saunders with them.

In an hour, it was possible to get Sue out of the building, and she was able to tell her story in the police car.

"The odd part about it," Burney said, when she'd finished, "is that if we'd been smart, we'd have realized that paper Everett held in his hand was the key to the whole thing. The burning sensation of the nicotine must have awakened him in the middle of the night. He realized that he'd been poisoned and that the poison had come from his tooth. He didn't have time, and was in no condition to find his fountain pen, or anything on which to scrawl a note. The poison was working fast. The nearest thing was his coat, and he remembered the wallet and the slip of paper on which the time of his appointment was written. When he died with that in his hand he was trying to tell us the name of his killer—his brother, Blake."

"We'd have saved Henry Gordon's life," Sue said, "if we'd guessed that."

"But we've got the murderer. It was all open and shut now. First Blake bumped Everett for money, revenge and jealousy. Then he killed Gordon because Gordon had guessed what he'd done and was a rival—"

Sue put her hand on her husband's. "Enough post mortem, darling," she said. "Don't I remember you saying something about hunting deer?"



The Key To Your Detective Story Reading Pleasure!

BLACK BOOK DETECTIVE

G-MEN DETECTIVE

DETECTIVE NOVEL MAGAZINE

TRIPLE DETECTIVE

THE PHANTOM DETECTIVE

THRILLING DETECTIVE

DETECTIVE MYSTERY NOVEL

MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE

On Sale at Your Favorite Newsstand

CATCH ME A KILLER

A Chet Lacey
Story



When he saw me, he
jumped back and his right
hand went up, holding a
gun

by

**ROBERT
SIDNEY
BOWEN**

ONE of the handicaps about the private detecting business is that every now and then you have to work for strictly free. That is, if you have any pride and want to keep your reputation on a high level with the police and with the boys who work the shady side of the street. As an example of what I mean, take that screwy business I, Chet Lacey, walked into a couple of weeks ago.

It was one of those evenings when it was so hot all you wanted was just one breath of cool air, and there just didn't seem to be one in town. Well, in the faint hope that I might find a cool breeze over by the river, I strolled that way and continued on across the Danvers Bridge. The traffic was absolutely light, and save for a young fellow in a loud checked suit slouching in front of me, there wasn't another soul to be seen

When you try to pin a rap on Lacey, you never can tell when he'll turn right around — and pin it back where it belongs!

on the bridge.

At least, that's what I thought. But suddenly the fellow in the checked suit glanced back over his shoulder, then backed against the railing, both hands out in front of him, as though to ward me off. I just stopped dead and gaped at him. Then his shrill voice hit the night air.

"No, wait! I don't care if Mortica—no, no, not me—"

Maybe he said more but I didn't hear it. What I heard was the world blowing up just behind my right ear, and the biggest chunk fell on the top of my head. That was that. I dropped into a bottomless pit of black silence, and . . .

When I next opened my eyes a face came floating into my vision. I promptly closed my eyes, and tried again. It was no use. The same face was there. The face of Sol Bierman, Chief of Homicide, and my best friend and dearest enemy. I was in his office, and Doc Cramer was sticking something that hurt like the devil on my head. Sol was behind his desk, and near him was Sergeant Heftner, his right hand man.

"Well, Chester, you had an accident. Cramer says you must have a concrete skull. I always suspected it."

It was Bierman who spoke, and the faint amusement in his voice started me burning, just as it always does.

"Thanks for the sympathy, pal!" I growled. "How'd I get here?"

"Courtesy of the Police Department," Sol replied straight faced. "Prowl Ten found you sleeping on the Danvers Bridge. They also found another chap, full of little bits of holes. Tell us about it, Chester."

I NSTINCTIVELY my hand went to my shoulder holstered gun. The gun wasn't there. It was in Bierman's hand. He had lifted it up from his desk. He shook his head.

"No," he said quietly. "Don't start breaking things. It was not with your gun. But you were there, and must have seen. So give, eh?"

My head still felt as though it was in four separate pieces, and I couldn't think any too well, but I was at least able to make a good guess at one item. The guy who'd been bumped off was that fellow in the checked suit, and Sol, not having the score, was hoping that I

could tell him some things. But the way he was going about it burned me up.

"The answer is, I know from nothing," I said. "I was taking a walk to cool off. There was a guy in front of me, and suddenly he spun around. The whole works blew up and I went out cold. That's all."

Disappointment slid across Bierman's face, but his eyes narrowed slightly.

"That's all?" he murmured with a nasty under note. "You mean, that the brilliant Chester Lacey was present at a killing, and he didn't see anything? Chester, I'm surprised. Do a little better, please. We're friends. Let's be frank."

"Suppose you tell me!" I snapped.

"Gladly," Sol came right back. "Why were you tailing Al Nason?"

Way in the back of my throbbing head the sound of that name stirred up something, but before I could freeze onto the vague thought, it slipped away into oblivion.

"Nason was the guy who got gunned?" I countered. "Did he get his for keeps?"

"For keeps," Bierman nodded, and touched a fingertip to a spot square in the middle of his forehead. "And now answer my question!"

I shook my head and instantly wished I hadn't. I had to wait a couple of seconds for the shafts of pain to die out before I could speak.

"I wasn't tailing him," I said. "That's gospel. I was just walking along. Somebody behind me must have been tailing Nason and when Nason turned around—*bing*—bang! And a second later I got clouted, to keep me from turning around. Find anything interesting on Nason?"

Bierman shook his head, and shut up for a few moments. He sat scowling down at his desk top as though he expected the right answer to pop up and start talking. I let him keep on scowling because the pieces of my brain were slowly coming back into mesh, and beginning to function.

"I believe you, Chester," Sol said at last. "Part of it I believe. About not tailing Nason—you wouldn't kid me about that, would you, Chester?"

"Not this time," I said, and Sol I knew I meant it.

"Another screwy one," he grunted with a heavy sigh. "Another tough one

to crack."

"Meaning what?" I put in quickly.

"What about this Nason, anyway?"

"Such ignorance," he snapped, and gave me a scornful look. "Al Nason was one of the big boys in the rackets years ago. But he reached too far, and we put the cuffs on his wrists. He got a four to ten stretch. That's the last I heard of him until tonight."

"So ho!" I had the picture now. "It's gonna be tough because any one of a couple of hundred mugs might have done it."

Sol Bierman shrugged and scowled down at his desk top some more. Then suddenly he sighed and handed me my gun.

"Go home and get some sleep, Chester," he said. "The medical attention is on the house. You're sure things—simply went boom?"

"That's right," I replied. "Things simply went boom."

"Okay, Chester," Bierman said, tight-lipped. "I've got to catch me a killer. The next detective course you take, be sure to study the part that teaches you to look behind as well as ahead. Good night."

FRANKLY, I had been weakening a little, but that last crack by Sol sewed things up tight. There'd be icebergs in the Gulf of Mexico before I'd tell him that Nason had cried out the name . . . Mortica.

"Thanks for the advice," I said, and moved me and my throbbing head out of there.

Twenty minutes after I left Police Headquarters I was under the shower in my own bathroom. The shower helped a lot. After I'd toweled myself dry, I poured a tall drink and took it to my favorite chair in the living room, and started the brains to working.

Sure, I was a dope for mixing in, but I've got a certain amount of pride. I don't like to have people gunned right under my nose, and I don't like to get sluggish. Getting conked on the bean is bad publicity for private detectives. It's against the rules!

Anyway, when something happens that concerns me I like to do things about it my own way. But my heavy thinking didn't get me very far. Oh, sure, the name, Mortica, meant some-

thing to me. Lou Mortica was one of our smooth, slick snakes-about-town. What the cops knew about him would fill a book. But what cops know and can prove are two different things. Personally, I had yet to bump into Mortica—in a business way.

Al Nason had been one of the big machine-gun and dark alley boys a little before I'd set myself up in the private eye business. But I had learned plenty about him, and Bierman having jogged my memory with his quick once-over made me remember other details concerning Mr. Nason. There was one, however, that I couldn't pin down. It was that little bit that had stirred in the back of my head when Sol first mentioned Nason. And as I sat in my favorite living room chair, try as I would, I couldn't drag it out into the open.

So at the end of my highball I gave it up. Obviously Lou Mortica, or one of his hired hands, had gunned Al Nason for some reason. By an act of fate Chet Lacey had stepped into the middle at the right time—and been belted. The cops were laughing at the Lacey right now, which is bad for business. You can't let that go on.

About an hour after that I called a taxi and I paid off the driver in the heart of our lights and music section of town. During the ride down a half-baked idea had formed in the Lacey brain. Did the killer, or killers, of Al Nason know the identity of the man they had knocked cold?

Somehow, I didn't think so, because it is one thing to slug Joe Ordinary Citizen and leave him lay, but it is something else again to slug a lad who makes his living nailing crooks.

No, I didn't think the killer, or killers, knew whom they had belted. After all, they don't hang you any higher for two murders than for one, and a bullet in my skull would have definitely made the affair air tight. Also, when you haven't got much to go on, your best bet is to stir things up and see what floats to the top. And I couldn't ask Sol Bierman for help—not after the horse laugh Sol had handed me.

So my first stop was the Blue Dove, one of our better-class sinks of iniquity. Lou Mortica owned a very nice slice of the Blue Dove, but I hadn't been in the place for a couple of years. Yet the

trick hat-check girl greeted me as though it had been only last night.

MENTALLY I noted down her face and figure for future reference and moved on inside. Instantly, the usual greased hair lad came sliding over. His smile was stiff, and his eyes were trying to see through cloth and leather to figure how much was in my wallet. I shook my head, pointed toward the bar, and then checked myself.

"Lou around?" I asked pleasantly.

Greased Hair gave me a blank look.

"Lou," he echoed and hardly moved his lips. "Lou who?"

I was in no mood for his phony act.

"The Lou who lets you make your fifty a week provided you are polite to customers!" I snapped. "Lou Mortica!"

He didn't like that, but he was in no position to do anything about it.

"I'll see," he said still lipped again. "Who wants to see him?"

I didn't give my right name. I hoped to get action faster another way.

"Just tell him, a friend of Al Nason's," I said.

As I spoke the words I looked at Greased Hair but good, and drew a blank. If the name, Al Nason, meant anything to him it didn't show in that waxy face of his. He waved his square wad menu card toward the bar.

"I'll tell him," he said, and left me.

I went to the bar for a Scotch. I sipped it slowly because I didn't know how many more I might have to sip before the night was over. All the while I was giving a very careful once-over of the customers in the long bar mirror. By moving a bit to one side or the other I was able to get a look at all of them.

Maybe a dozen I knew to speak to, and maybe half a dozen more I knew by sight. There was one, though, I couldn't make up my mind about. She was sitting with a couple of gents, both strangers to me, and she was as luscious a creature as you ever want to see. Absolute perfection from the top of her spun gold hair to all the way down. I wondered whether I had ever seen her before, or just in some movie or fashion magazine. Each time I sneaked a look at her something almost clicked in my mind, but not quite.

As a matter of fact, the slick chick intrigued me so I was of half a mind to

ease over for a close-up. Before I could put the idea into practise, Greased Hair was back.

"Mr. Mortica is not in, or expected this evening," he said. "What message do you wish to leave?"

"None, I'll find him elsewhere," I said, and gave a little indicating nod of my head. "Who's the golden girl?"

Greased Hair slid his oily eyes around to my face.

"I wouldn't know, and I certainly wouldn't try to find out," he murmured.

A cute little bit of advice. I didn't bother to answer him. I just turned my back and went on inhaling my Scotch, spending my time looking at the Golden Girl. But it was no dice. Where, when, and how I'd seen her before remained a mystery. Finally I collected my hat from the outer lobby chick, and eased out through the fancy grilled doors to the sidewalk.

I shook my head at the admiral who wanted to call me a cab, and just stood there a moment, thinking deeply. After a bit I went wandering casually down the street. You know, just the bored play-boy heading for another night spot to see what it had to offer. And at the end of two blocks I was a very pleased guy. For once a miracle had come to pass for the Lacey. I actually had struck pay dirt. I had me a shadow!

JUST to make sure I wandered on down the street and went into another, but less classy, night spot. Whether Lou Mortica owned any of it I didn't know, or care. I went over to the bar, ordered, and waited for my shadow to ooze in. He did about five minutes later, and I was able to get a good look at him. He was one of the usual rat-faced punks who do chores for top drawer punks like Mortica. For a second I was tempted to step over and push in his rat face for him. But I killed the idea, sipped my drink, and made like I didn't even know he existed.

By the time I'd finished my drink I'd worked out the next step. It depended, though, on whether the Lacey luck was holding. I moved away from the bar and headed toward the door. Out the corner of my eye I saw Rat Face gulp the rest of his and quickly toss a bill on the bar. I went on out and started wandering along some more. Rat Face

kept a half block behind me. I led him over east toward a taxi rank. And, praise be, the Lacey luck was still holding. A cabby I'd done more than a couple of favors for was at the head of the line. I popped in back just as he recognized me.

"Hi, Mr. Lacey!" he cried. "You—"

"Pull away and roll along at the usual speed, Terry," I cut him off quickly. "And tilt that rear view mirror so I can look in it, not you."

"Sure, sure!" Terry gulped, and did as ordered. "Jeeze, you on a case?"

"Could be," I grunted, and fixed my eyes on the rear view mirror. "Just roll along and take a turn now and then. I'll let you know later."

Five blocks later I was dead certain. My shadow had grabbed the next cab in line and it was sticking to me like glue, not over a block behind. I glanced ahead and made a quick decision. We were in the apartment house section of town, and the buildings threw lots of nice shadows across the side street.

"Get this just once, Terry," I said, leaning forward. "Pull in at the next corner, and make like I'm paying you. Then circle around and come back to the same spot in about five minutes. Got it?"

Terry nodded, and a few seconds later pulled into the corner curb. I got out, slammed the door, and pushed my hand in through his window. I pulled out my hand, waited for him to drive off and then looked up and down the street. Rat Face's cab was rolling toward me. I turned and started down the dark side street, but the instant I was in the deep shadow I stopped and flattened against the building.

I had time to take just one deep breath when Rat Face's cab stopped at the corner and he ducked out. The cab rolled on, and after a moment's hesitation he started down the side street. He wasn't two feet away when he came abreast of me. Maybe he sensed something because he stopped short, jumped back, and his right hand went up holding a gun. My right hand, held stiff and knife-like, caught him on the side of the neck. I hit the right spot I was aiming for and it paralyzed him completely for about three seconds, just time enough for me to chop a good one to the jaw.

He folded, and I caught him in my arms and pulled him back against the roll. The wait for Terry's cab to come back seemed like a hundred years. Twice I had to chop Rat Face to keep him quiet, and once when an elderly man and woman strolled by I had to mumble like we were both stewed to the gills, and trying to help each other. That sent the elderly couple on their way without stopping.

When Terry came along. I got Rat Face in back, and climbed in beside him.

"My place, Terry!" I snapped. "But don't get us pinched."

Terry knew what that meant, and didn't ask questions. He broke every traffic law in the books, but only when the cops weren't looking. When he pulled up in front of my place, he twisted around.

"Anything I can do?"

"Yes," I answered. "Help me, like this guy is going to sleep it off in my bed, in case we meet other tenants. Then come down here and wait. I think I'll be needing you again."

TEN minutes later Rat Face was slumped cold on my living room couch and I was looking over the two little twenty-five caliber automatics I'd found in his pockets. I unloaded both guns, tossed them on a table, and went into the bathroom and soaked a towel. I brought it out and began smacking his face. After the fifth smack he sat up, put out protesting hands, and began mumbling. I tossed the towel away and poured him a straight drink.

"Down that," I said and held it out.

He did so automatically, and it was just the thing. His beady eyes cleared, and his two hands started edging toward his pockets.

"Your gats are on the table over there," I said with a side jerk of my head. "Okay, why were you tailing me?"

His eyes narrowed, and he shook his head.

"I wasn't tailin' nobody," he snarled.

"What's the idea? You can't—"

"No?" I echoed, and swiped my right fist across his nose.

He half howled with pain, and the claret started.

"Mortica put you on me!" I said. "Where is he?"

"You're crazy! I don't know any—"

I clipped him twice. Once to the left, and once to the right. His snuzzle took on the look of an over-ripe lump of horse meat. He buried his face in his hands, and waited for me to lay off.

"Up to you, punk," I told him. "I want some dope, and I want it fast. I'm the mug you clouted tonight when you gunned Al Nason, see?"

That brought his head up as though an invisible string had been jerked.

"I didn't gun him!" he choked out.

"You can't prove it!"

"No?" I snapped, and held up a slug from one of his guns.

I rolled it slowly between my thumb and forefinger. He stared at it, like it was the swaying head of a cobra. I let him stare at it for a full minute.

"A guy by the name of Al Nason was gunned tonight," I started speaking. "By accident I was there, so I got clouted. The killer didn't look to see who he hit, but it was me. The story will be in the morning papers. The cops would just *love* to have the killer by then, too. Catch on?"

Rat Face tore his eyes from the slug I was twisting and looked at me. He had to lick his lips twice before he could speak. His voice sounded like an off key noon whistle.

"I didn't gun nobody. That's straight, so help me!"

"Who cares?" I answered. "Particularly, the cops. Nason was a no-good, fresh out of stir, I think. The cops don't care *who* gunned him. They'd settle for *any* punk they could burn for it. This little bullet here, and one of those guns over there. Well, *what* do you know? The gun and the bullet that killed Al Nason. And here's something else? I didn't get knocked cold quite quick enough. I managed to get a look at the mug who pulled the trigger behind me. He was a little, thin sort of rat-faced punk, just your build and looks."

I let my voice drop off there, and just stood looking at him and rolling the bullet between my thumb and forefinger. Ever watch a man's courage turn to water and start to come out of him in sweat? It isn't pretty, and it's twice as unpretty when it's a punk like the one sitting on my living room couch. In ten seconds his features were jumping, and

his hands shook like he had them on a high voltage wire. Then he cracked completely, and slobbered out the words.

"Lacy, no! I didn't do any gunning tonight, so help me! Look, I just tailed you because Mortica told me to, see? When you asked for him in the Blue Dove, and said you were a friend of Nason, Charlie came and told me. So I phoned Lou, and told him. He said for me to tail you and find out everything I could. I swear it, Lacy! That's the only way I come into this thing. I didn't gun nobody!"

BELIEVED the little mug. Why?

Because it's an important thing in my business to learn every single item I possibly can about the boys who travel the shady side of the street. And one of the items about Lou Mortica was that he never left any of the *important* details to his hired hands. That's why he was still in business, and the cops were biting their finger nails right up to the second joint. In short, Mortica never left a witness who could be paid, or clouted, into tagging him.

"Give me a break, Lacey! I swear I gave it to you straight. Have a heart!"

The whining little mobster dragged me out of my reverie. And a disturbing one, I might add. I could see the picture but it didn't do me a terrible lot of good. If Lou Mortica had gunned Al Nason, I was a million miles from proving it. Also, I was maybe two million miles from knowing why. Then suddenly the Lacey brain got out of second gear and leaped into high. I poured the Rat Face another drink and handed it to him.

"Where's Mortica?" I asked.

Rat Face caught himself just in time, and didn't complete the shake of his head.

"Out at his new roadhouse," he said. "The Purple Swan, on the valley road. Out there all the time these days. Got an apartment. Look, Lacey . . ."

I didn't wait for the rest. He had downed his drink, and I was through with him. I chopped his chin for maybe the sixth time in the last hour. Then I got some rope and adhesive tape, and made him very *comfortable* on the couch. Next I went over to my desk and wrote a letter, and addressed the envelope. Lastly, I went out and down to the curb where

Terry was impatiently waiting. I tossed the sealed letter into his lap.

"Deliver that, Terry," I said. "And don't give up until you have delivered it—in person. Understand?"

Terry started to nod, then sat up pop-eyed as he read the name and address.

"Hep!" he gulped. "What's this?"

"Skip it!" I stopped him. "Get moving, and don't forget what I said. In person, and as soon as possible!"

Terry gulped and nodded again, kicked his heap into life and tooled it away from the curb. I watched it go, then walked around to the garage where I keep my car. I had the attendant bring it out and check it for gas and oil. Then I slid in behind the wheel and stepped on the starter. Funny, my stepping on that starter was almost like pressing a secret button in my brain. I mean, that suddenly the little thing that had been stirring around way in back suddenly leaped forward and ballooned up in nothing flat.

For a good full minute I sat behind that car wheel gaping at nothing at all. Then I came out of my trance and drove across town to the *Daily Globe* Building. A friend of mine who worked there got me into the back file morgue, and started asking questions. I shooed him out and went to work. Half hour later, when I came out, the picture was complete. I was certain I knew all the answers. There was just a *minor* detail left—proving my answers were correct.

The Purple Swan, located about nine miles outside of town, is no different from any one of the fifty or sixty thousand other roadhouses in this country of ours, so I won't bore you with descriptive details. I drove into the well filled parking lot, left my heap there, and walked over and in through the front door. I checked my hat, passed up the tables, and went over to the bar. It was jammed but that didn't make me mad. I didn't feel like a drink, anyway. And it gave me more time to look the place over. I did, and Lou Mortica was nowhere to be seen. That suited me fine, too.

SLOWLY I moved away from the bar and over toward a heavy curtained doorway. Nobody stopped me as I slipped between the curtains. Stairs led upward, and so I climbed steps.

There was a short hall and three doors, all three closed. I was trying to make a guess when a well dressed ape stepped in front of me.

"Gents' room downstairs, mister," he said through his crooked teeth.

"I know," I said. "I'm looking for Mortica. He in his office?"

The ape's eyes flicked toward the door on the right, and that was what I wanted to know.

"Maybe," he grunted. "But, can be he's busy, see? Get on back down there, mister."

"Okay," I sighed and lifted my hand as though to adjust my tie.

Instead I slipped it under my jacket front, and came out with my gun. I doubt if the ape knew what hit him, but something did. My gun barrel right on his jaw. He blinked, sagged, and folded. I stepped over him and pushed open the door on the right. And there was Lou Mortica seated behind the biggest desk I've ever seen in my life. He looked up quickly as I came in, froze for an instant, and then smiled slowly. He kept both hands right on top of his desk where I could see them.

"Guess I'll have to get me a new boy to announce visitors," he murmured.

"I don't think you'll be needing one," I murmured and dropped into a chair. I let my gun rest on the arm where he could see it.

Contrary to the movies, and dime thrillers, Lou Mortica was not a good looking, dashing type of mobster. He had a face like the back of a hack, a build to go with it, and a pair of eyes that would fit in any cobra's head.

"No?" he echoed. "What's the gag, Lacey?"

"No gag," I told him. "Strictly business. You were very unsmart, Mortica, to pick the wrong guy to use as a cover while you crawled up on Al Nason. I guess you've guessed by now it was me, eh?"

I didn't expect a thing from Mortica and that's just what I got, a blank look. He dead-panned me for about half a minute before he spoke.

"It's still a gag, Lacey," he finally said. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about. Take your cannon, and get out of here. And next time, at least knock."

As though that was all, he turned his

attention to some papers on his desk. I sat right where I was, grinning outwardly, but not too happy inwardly.

"There's to be no next time," I suddenly said in a voice that brought his head up. "You gunning Al Nason is just one of those things, so far as I'm concerned, but slugging me is something else again. It wasn't quite quick enough, Mortica. I got a look at you as I went down."

He opened his mouth to speak, then checked himself for a couple of seconds. During that length of time his face tightened, and his eyes seemed to shrink back into his head.

"Look, Lacey, stop playing games," he suddenly said. "We've both been around too long. If what you said was true the cops would have been here hours ago. They haven't even called me. So, cut the blackmail effort. Lou Mortica doesn't pay off to anybody!"

For a brief instant I was tempted to climb over that desk of his and beat his teeth down his throat with my gun. But, I held everything.

"So you lose again," I said. "I know you gunned Nason, I know why, and I've got proof that will stand up. Right now, though, he happens to be lying down. On the couch in my apartment, to be exact. And I *do* mean the rat-faced mug you told over the phone to tail me and keep you posted on everything. However, I sort of decided to keep you posted in person.

I wasn't sure, but I thought a startled look leaped into Mortica's half sunken eyes for a brief instant.

"What little mug?" he said almost tonelessly.

I GRINNED and casually let my gun dangle from my finger through the trigger guard.

"You know the man I mean," I said. "What he can tell at your trial will be plenty. It was right after my little apartment session with him that I suddenly guessed *why* you gunned Nason. I had to go back eight years in the newspaper files to get it all, though. A very gorgeous chick, Mortica. I saw her in the Blue Dove tonight. Eight years ago she was known as Belle Mason, of stage, radio, and what have you. I think she still goes by that name, doesn't she?"

I paused to give Mortica a chance to

say something, but he didn't. He just sat looking at me, his screwy eyes seeming to sink deeper, and deeper into his skull.

"But eight years ago she was actually Mrs. Al Nason, wife of an up and coming big shot about town," I suddenly threw at him. "And I'll bet all the dough I ever hope to make that she still is. That was the rub. Al, when he went away, wouldn't let her get a divorce. Maybe he knew you had your eyes on her even then. Anyway, Al came back to claim her.

"It was a mess, wasn't it, Mortica? You couldn't buy his silence, plus a one way ticket to some nice spot about ten thousand miles away. So that left you just one way out. But you were unsmart not to check the guy you slugged. Yes, another slug from your gun, Mortica, would have made things just dandy for you and Belle Mason. Right or wrong? I had to guess at *some* of it, you know."

Lou Mortica didn't say anything, but he didn't have to. His eyes told me that I had come near to the actual truth. It was the centuries old triangle business once again. Somebody should write a song about it.

"Yes, very unsmart, Mortica," I said when he just continued to sit there. "The song I can sing, and the song that punk I've got tied up in my apartment can sing, will make a beautiful duet for some jury. Don't you think so?"

I leaned forward a little, and grinned. But actually I was all chilled up tight inside. And how! I had sensed the stealthy movement behind me. I imagine that Mortica had pressed his foot on a little carpet button under his desk. He certainly hadn't moved his hands to press one. Anyway, the thing was coming to a finish fast. I didn't like it at all, but there had been only one way for me to play it. And so I just grinned tauntingly at Mortica, and steel-ed myself as best I could. I actually heard the faint swish of the gun as it came down for my head. And then it was a Lacey blackout for the second time in one night!

When I opened my eyes again, I was still sitting in the same chair. But Mortica wasn't anywhere to be seen. Seated at his desk was the well dressed ape I had clouted out in the hall. When

he saw that my eyes were open he grinned wolfishly.

"Kinda evens the score, hey, bub?" he chuckled at me and patted the gun he held in his right hand. "Speak the word, and I'll put my team one ahead."

I didn't say anything. I lifted my two empty hands to my throbbing head, and then started fumbling through my pockets, as though not quite sure what I was doing. The ape chuckled but watched me like a hawk. I didn't pay any attention to him until I had stuck my hand into the pocket where I keep my ring of keys and checked that it wasn't there any more. Then I leaned back with a big sigh of relief, and grinned right back at the ape.

"Just let the score ride, Fatso, until Mortica comes back from my apartment," I said. "That is, if he comes back."

The ape's grin faded and he glowered. "Meaning what by that?"

"You'll find out," I grunted.

And I left it at that. The ape prodded me with a dozen questions, but I just closed my eyes and made like I had gone back to sleep. Every now and then I took a look at him, and each time he was more worried, and there was more sweat on his face. Being all muscle, and no brains, he couldn't figure anything. And so, it was getting him minute by minute. Me, I just sat where I was trying to ignore the bells that still rang in my head, praying harder than I had ever prayed for anything in my life.

THE clock on Mortica's desk had told me I'd been out cold about twenty-five minutes, but it was twice twenty-five minutes more before there came a rattling of the door handle, then a banging on the panels, and then dear old Sol Bierman's booming voice.

"This is the police! Open up!"

The ape sat erect as though he'd been shot. He gaped at the door, and then gaped at me. I nodded and sat up slowly.

"Yeah, the cops, Fatso," I said. "Mortica isn't coming back. I think Mortica is going to burn in the hot seat. You want to burn, too, after shooting it out? Or do you want to toss me both guns and I'll open the door."

The ape did have brains after all. He didn't hesitate. He picked up my gun off the desk, and tossed it to me, and then he tossed his own gun. I caught

both and went over and unlocked and opened the door. There was Sol Bierman, gun in hand, and right behind him was Sergeant Heftner, and a couple of others boys from the Bureau.

"Come in, Sol," I said stepping back. "You make out with Lou Mortica all right?"

Bierman was so mad or maybe so disappointed to find me standing on my own feet that he couldn't speak for a couple of moments. But when he did, the words came at me like machine-gun bullets.

"I ought to throw you into the can on general principles!" he roared. "Who the devil do you think you are, sending me a key and a note telling me to go to your apartment and wait for Nason's killer to walk in? Gosh knows why, but I did, and what do I find? A punk all taped up and—"

"What about Mortica?" I shouted.

"He's dead!" Bierman snapped. "He came in with his gun, saw me, and tried to use it. But not soon enough. The punk had told me a few things, and— and now you start talking fast. I want everything!"

"Not here, Sol," I said and raised protesting hands. "My head is falling off; and besides I'm sick of this room."

A couple of hours later, when the milkmen were just beginning their day's run, I mashed out a cigarette in the tray on Sol Bierman's office desk, and then gestured faintly.

"So you see, it was just one of those things, Sol," I said. "The only way to prove anything was to make Mortica perform. I played him into going to my place for that punk and bumping into you. Sure, he could have just laughed and had me tossed out of the Purple Swan. But it was that punk trussed up in my apartment that got him, just as I figured—and prayed—it would. Mortica wasn't sure how much the punk actually knew, or had told me, and so he took my keys and went there to—well, you can guess! So, there you are. Of course you can arrest Belle Mason, and maybe she'll tell you a whole lot more. But why bother now?"

Sol Bierman grunted and didn't say anything for a moment. Then suddenly he gave me a look like I was the kid made to stay after school.

"If you'd told me in the first place about hearing Nason speak Mortica's

name, Chester," he began, "you'd have—"

"Sure, sure!" I cut in harshly. "But I didn't for two reasons. One, because whenever I get slugged, I take care of things my own way."

"And the other?" Sol Bierman asked gently.

"No client," I said, and grinned. "So why not some kind of profit? Say like a return favor from the police some day, when maybe I'll be needing one? Pretty nice publicity hey pal? I mean, the

story of how you gunned Lou Mortica in the same morning edition of the paper that carries the story of how Al Nason was murdered?"

Sol Bierman eyed me for a long moment, and then threw up both hands in resigned disgust.

"Why did I ever have to meet you anyway?" he cried. "Get out of here. Even a cop's got to get *some* sleep!"

So I scrambled.



Highlights for Next Issue!

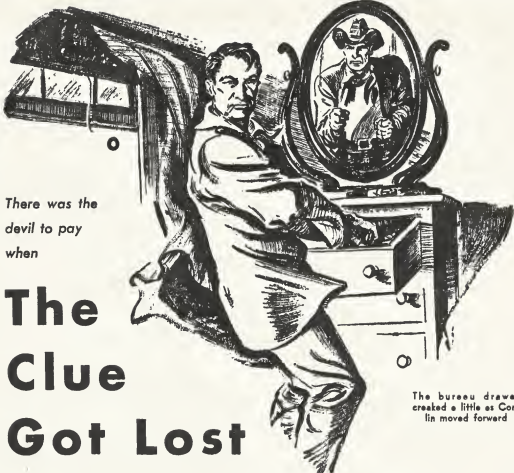
CAPITAL punishment for the criminals and capital entertainment for you is in "Death Halts a Holiday," the live-wire mystery novel by Edward Churchill headlining the next issue. It's a Nick Blade thriller that hums from start to finish. '.

REACHING back into the lives of several respectable citizens and professional men, Dale Clark spins an effective character study in "Black Sheep Kill." There's supposed to be a black sheep in every family, but—

IF you're not a Willie Klump fan by this time, you'll certainly join the ranks of chortling readers when you get a look at Joe Archibald's new rib-tickling detective story, "Stuck With the Evidence." It's Willie at his best, and that's something.

MURDER Turns the Curve" by Bruno Fischer leads a parade of short stories in the next issue which also includes real crime puzzlers by such popular authors as Stewart Sterling, Robert Sidney Bowen, and a host of your other favorites.

EXCEPTIONAL reading pleasure is in store for you with this array of novelets, short stories and features. Then there'll be Official Business, that delightful get-together between the editor, authors and readers. Be on hand.



There was the
devil to pay
when

The Clue Got Lost

The bureau draw
creaked a little as Con-
lin moved forward

by
RAY CUMMINGS

ROBERT TARN was tense and grim as he drove his rattling car down the last declivity of the little mountain road. It was darker here in the lower valley, with the ragged rocky cliffs ranging overhead, so that there was just a ribbon of the purple, starry sky.

His destination was close ahead of him now—Jake Conlin's few acres of ranch land where, because of the river, there were little patches of trees and grass. Conlin's small ranchhouse was visible off to the left. It stood backed against a cliff, with a slope down to the river in front of it.

A light showed in one of the ranchhouse windows. The rest of the house was dark. Tarn knew that the light

was in Conlin's sitting room. Was Conlin back from town yet? Was he sitting there waiting for Tarn to arrive?

The revolver with its silencer bulged the pocket of Tarn's jacket. By good luck, he had got it today in Denver, from a place where he wasn't known so that it could never be traced. He put his hand to touch it now. The feel of it was comforting, yet frightening. Frightening, because suddenly the vague subconscious thought of what he might do when he met Conlin tonight leaped clear into his mind.

He hadn't wanted the weapon just to defend himself from Conlin's wrath. He knew now it was more than that. Far more. Big Jake Conlin had discovered that he had been tricked, of course.

Tarn had sensed it in his manner, heard it in his voice, seen it in the gleam of his eyes all this past week.

He was biding his time, to get proof. And today, early this morning when Tarn had started in his car for Denver, Conlin had said he was going to ride over to Rocky Gulch, and spend the day there. He had said it queerly.

Robert Tarn was a mining engineer, a slim, dark-haired, saturnine-looking man of thirty. A clever fellow. He knew his business, and he had had a fair success at it. Success. But it had given him nothing but a job, a salary. At thirty he had realized that he was getting nowhere. A few thousand painstakingly saved, and the sudden riches he had always craved were as far away as ever.

Then had come this sudden chance. The opportunity of a lifetime. Would he let it be snatched away from him now? Tarn's thin lips went into a grim line, as he felt the answer there in his jacket pocket bumping against his hip bone.

The dim outlines of the Livingston Mining Company's half erected buildings showed off to the left of Conlin's ranchhouse. It was a new mine opening here on the land adjacent to Conlin's. Copper and silver had been discovered here, and the Livingston Company had leased the lands from their owners and were starting operations. But no workable minerals had been found on Jake Conlin's property. Tarn was employed by the Livingston Company. His report had declared Conlin's land worthless.

It was eleven o'clock as Tarn drove up to the ranchhouse and left his car under the shed. Up on the nearby ridge, the bunkhouse where the Livingston construction crew were living showed a few straggling lights. Some of them winked out as for an instant Tarn stood staring.

Then he entered the house. It was silent, with just a glow of light from the living room doorway. Tarn lived here. His bedroom was on the second floor. He had been boarding here a month while he made out his final reports for the Livingston Company.

The stairs to the second floor were dim. Tarn didn't go upstairs. His

hand went again to his jacket pocket as he moved along the hall toward the living room. Perhaps his fears were foolish. Perhaps Conlin hadn't suspected anything.

Old Mrs. Greer, Conlin's housekeeper, was in the living room. She was sitting in a rocker, reading by the single table light. She looked up, with a hand to her ear because she was a little deaf, as Tarn stood before her.

"Oh, hello," he said. "I thought you would be in bed, Mrs. Greer." Queer how hard it was to keep his voice normal! "Didn't Mr. Conlin get home yet?"

"I was waitin' up for him," she said, in the flat voice of the deaf. "Guess I better go up. Gettin' late."

They left the light burning and went upstairs together. The old woman's room was on the third floor. Once asleep up there, she would never hear anything that went on down in the rest of the house.

"Good night, Mrs. Greer," Tarn said. "Call me at seven."

She went on up and Tarn went into his bedroom. For half an hour he sat tense on the edge of his narrow little bed with the small lamp burning on the bedroom table. The mountain silence outside seemed a ponderable thing, drifting in the window.

Tarn was waiting for the clump of Conlin's arriving horse. Jake Conlin was of the old school. He disliked automobiles. He had never learned to drive. He wanted no part of such things. Horseback was good enough for him.

But the silence was unbroken. Perhaps Conlin had decided to stay in Rocky Gulch for the night.

At last Tarn undressed, closed his bedroom door, put out his light and went to bed. He left the revolver in his top bureau drawer.

The little bed was not much more than a cot, hard and uncomfortable. That sort of thing was characteristic of Conlin. A man of fifty now, and all his life he had been satisfied to have everything rugged. No luxuries.

Not that, for Tarn! Huddled in the heavy bedclothes, he lay tense, still listening. But the thing now was clearer than ever. Riches, ease, luxury. They all lay ahead, waiting for Robert Tarn. Nothing to do about it tonight. The relief that he would not encounter Conlin

tonight was relaxing. He let his mind drift off into the rosy future. . . .

Abruptly Tarn realized that he had been asleep. The darkness was still solid outside his window, with just a sheen of starlight here in the room. The sound of hoofbeats had aroused him. Conlin had returned.

In the first confusion of being half-awake, half-asleep, Tarn lay stiff and taut, listening. Now Conlin was coming in the front door. The clink of his big spurs on the board flooring was audible, then the slamming of the door and Conlin's heavy tread coming upstairs. His bedroom was on the second floor, down the hall from Tarn's.

Tarn was vaguely hoping that Conlin would go to bed. Tomorrow would be soon enough. Tarn realized that what he might have to do needed careful planning.

Then abruptly Conlin's tread was in the hall outside Tarn's door. The door opened. Conlin's big, burly figure loomed dark against the dim yellow sheen of light in the hall.

"So you're awake?" Conlin growled. "You blasted cheat!"

Tarn was up on one elbow, huddling under the bed covers. The starlight shining through the window was enough to illumine Conlin's heavy-jawed, red face. He had discovered the trickery; no argument on that. He stood with his booted feet planted wide, his hands on his thick hips. He was glaring angrily.

"Why—why what's the matter?" Tarn's voice was still a little blurred with sleep.

He realized that he was confused. Easy now! Get your wits! He forced himself to snap into alertness. His hand went to his thin black hair, brushing it back from his forehead.

"You're all excited, Mr. Conlin," he said. "Something wrong?"

CONLIN'S laugh was a snor of contempt. "So you don't know what's wrong, eh? Can't even guess, can you?"

He tossed a little chunk of rock at Tarn. It hit the iron bedpost and fell to the floor, down in the dimness of the room. But Tarn knew very well what it was—a little gray-black chunk of rock with a dark-red streak in it, like blood.

"Wh—where did you get that?" Tarn heard himself stammering. "What is

that thing, anyway?"

"Where did I get it?" Conlin said. "Out of your trunk. That, and a few other pieces like it. The ore of cinnabar—ain't that what you call it?"

"Out of my trunk?" Tarn murmured. Backed against the wall by the door, big Conlin stood glaring. Too infuriated to go to bed, he wanted to tell Tarn about it now.

"Sure I went to your trunk! Why wouldn't I, when I got to figurin' you were a dirty doublecrosser with your shifty look and smooth words? Cinnabar, the ore of quicksilver! Your reports to the company showed silver and copper around here, but there wasn't anything about cinnabar, was there? And my land is worthless. That's what your report said. You're the expert, so you ought to know! So the company rejected my land, wouldn't take up its option!"

Tarn sat up higher in the little bed. "Your land is worthless, Conlin," he said. "That was my report, and that's what it is. Anyway, it isn't your land now, since I've bought it from you, so what's the argument?"

Bluff it through. Still Tarn was clinging to the vague hope that Conlin was only guessing.

The little cave-mouth up on the ragged cliff of Conlin's land had been almost buried by rocky debris. Tarn had found it, explored the little series of grottos back underground, found the hugely rich outcroppings of the cinnabar. A lifetime opportunity, so that Tarn had reported the Conlin property worthless.

When the Livingston Company had turned him down, Conlin had been horribly disappointed, of course. He had planned to go East, where his teen-age niece was living in Virginia with relatives. It hadn't been hard for Tarn to persuade him that he could still do that, by selling Tarn the house here, and the worthless land that went with it.

Conlin was thinking of that now. "Sure you bought it from me," he was saying. "You with your cock and bull story of getting married, bringing your bride here to live in this house which would be so romantic.

"Well, I own it now anyway," Tarn said. "I paid you forty-five hundred dollars, got your deed all signed and delivered. If there's minerals here, so

much the better for me."

Tarn's heart leaped. It seemed for an instant that the raging Conlin would leap at the bed. But he didn't. He just stood glaring.

"I didn't know anything about cinnabar when I bought your place," Tarn added.

"You're a liar!" Conlin retorted.

"Am I? Okay. What do you think you're going to do about it?"

"Do?" Conlin said. "You think I got no proof you're a crook? Don't kid yourself. I spent fifty dollars in town today, telephonin' around. I located the assay office, was over in Salt Lake where you had my cinnabar analyzed. Not under your own name, but the description of you tallied. And that was before you turned in your report to Livingston! And I found the cave here on my property."

"Wait till I get a cigarette, and we'll talk about this," Tarn said. He leaped out of bed, padded across the room to the bureau. He stood with his back to the bureau, lighting a cigarette. "So what do you think you're going to do about it?" he demanded.

"Do?" Conlin said. "You asked me that before, you little rat. But I don't mind tellin' you. I'll have you jailed for fraud! My place is worth a hundred thousand, maybe more, and you sure knew it and turned in an official report to your company just the opposite. Defrauding me, and your boss too. Don't kid yourself. That's what it is! And what happens to you, I don't give a hoot! I'll get my place back, that's a cinch. And what you think Livingston'll do to you?"

It was as though Conlin now was saying all the vague things Tarn had been thinking for days past. Maybe he could escape going to jail. But he would lose the property certainly. And lose his job with Livingston. His chance for riches gone. His professional career wrecked, because, of course, no other mining company would ever hire him.

He had planned it so differently. Live here in this little ranchhouse he had bought, working for Livingston. And then, in a year or so, "discover" his cave of cinnabar.

There still was a chance to do that! "You—told people in town about this?" Tarn murmured.

"I don't blab my business," Conlin said sarcastically. "When I get things lined up I jump—you're sure gonna find that out, Tarn! What I'll do to you will be plenty!"

THE bureau drawer creaked a little, but Conlin didn't hear it. He had moved forward, coming out into the center of the room. Then he saw the level revolver. He snarled a startled oath as the plop of the shot through the silencer sounded.

He jumped. Tarn's first shot missed him. He kept on coming and Tarn, steadying his shaking outstretched hand, fired again.

Got him! Conlin's roar became a gasping gurgle in his throat as his big body crumpled and fell, lay crumpled, horribly twitching and quivering for a moment, then was still.

The thing was done! In the dimness of the bedroom, with just a sheen of starlight from the window and the faint yellow glow from the hall door, Tarn stood panting, gathering his wits. This was what he had planned, but certainly he hadn't expected to do it this way, here in his own bedroom. He went into the upper hall, stood listening. The deaf old Mrs. Greer, up on the third floor, had not been aroused.

What Tarn must do was clear to him now, so that the momentary panic he had felt was gone. He laid the revolver on his bureau. Then he stopped over the body.

The head was gruesome with the bullet in it, but there wasn't much blood. The bulging eyes stared with the glassy stare of death. Tarn gripped the body by the armpits, walking backward, dragging it face up. In a moment he had it downstairs and in the living room. He left it crumpled on the floor in the center of the room, with an overturned chair beside it.

Conlin must have extinguished the table lamp. Tarn lighted it, and left the front door of the house open. Then he went back upstairs. With fingerprints carefully wiped off the gun, he took it down and dropped it by the living room door.

Nothing else to do. It was as simple as that. They would find the gun and see that it had a silencer, which would explain why the sound of the gun hadn't

awakened Tarn, sleeping upstairs. Nobody would ever be able to prove anything. How could they? And Tarn, so far as anyone knew, had no possible motive.

For a moment Tarn stood to be sure he had forgotten nothing. There were no bloodstains on the floor, nor on himself. Then he remembered the little chunk of cinnabar ore which Conlin had thrown at him. It was on the floor. He picked it up, hid it in his bureau drawer.

Back in bed, Tarn drew the covers up over him and tried to sleep. Dawn was coming when at last he drifted off. . . .

He was awakened by a scream and sat up in the little bed to find daylight flooding the room. Mrs. Greer was downstairs screaming. Then she was up here, with ashen face, shaking, babbling that Mr. Conlin was downstairs dead. The sleepy-looking Tarn, with his bathrobe around him, rushed downstairs with her.

Over at the company bunkhouse, the Livingston construction crew were having breakfast. In the clear mountain air the screams carried to them and a dozen of them came on the run. They crowded in, stood staring, babbling.

"Better keep out," Tarn said. "You got a phone over there. Somebody go phone for the sheriff."

One of them dashed away. "Mrs. Greer found our front door open," Tarn said. "Somebody got in here during the night and shot him. These's the gun lying there." As one of the men stooped, Tarn added sharply, "Keep away from it, you fool! Don't touch it!"

They were a rough lot on this job, and somehow Tarn had never liked them. Especially the foreman, a big surly fellow named Parks. He was here now. He stood by the door, staring at Tarn.

"You were here all night," Parks said suddenly. "Pretty heavy sleeper, eh?"

It made Tarn's temper flare. "What do you mean by that, Parks? If I'd heard anything, don't you suppose I'd have come down?"

"The gun has a silencer, is why you didn't hear it," Parks agreed. But his faint grin was nasty. "I was thinkin' about this overturned chair. A fight here, and you sleepin' upstairs."

All the men were murmuring now.

"Whatever went on, I didn't hear it," Tarn said. "I came in before Conlin

got home last night. Went upstairs with Mrs. Greer, and she woke me up this morning with her screaming. I didn't see Conlin. Didn't hear him come in."

Let them try to prove anything different. Parks had picked up the gun gingerly, was examining it.

"Hadn't you better wait for the sheriff?" Tarn said sarcastically. "What you think you are, a high-class detective, Parks?"

The big red-faced foreman gazed up with a twisted grin. "Maybe I am, at that," he said. "Matter of fact, I was on the Denver Police Force once. Nothin' fancy. Just a pavement pounder, but it's somethin'."

SUDDENLY Parks was whispering to two or three of the men around him. Tarn stood silent, with a little vague clutching fear inside him as he watched them solemnly poking around the room. Then they were all excited, all whispering, clustering around Parks.

In the muttered babble, Parks said, "Blamed if I know. Seems it jus' got lost, didn't it?"

Got lost? What got lost?

"Here's somethin', Pete," one of the men suddenly called to Parks.

They bent down to the board floor near the body and near the living room doorway. Tarn went toward them.

"What is it?" he said.

When he bent over, he could see it—little lines of scratches on the floor. Some were here, some were on the door. Following them like a little trail, Parks was now out in the hall, leading for the stairs.

"—got lost because it didn't happen in the livin' room!" Tarn heard Parks saying. "And when he got dragged here, face up, feet draggin' with heels to the floor—they scratches is from his spurs!"

A little broken trail of scratches, leading upstairs. Easy now! Say nothing! You can't stop them from going upstairs! Cold with mounting terror, Tarn followed them up. A few feet along the upper hall. Revealing little trail. How well Tarn remembered gripping the body under the armpits, dragging it backwards! Trailing legs and feet with spurs down, scratching along the flooring. Tarn had never thought of those

cursed spurs!

They were crowding into Tarn's little bedroom and he was out in the hall, standing tense, waiting. For what? This was no definite proof of murder. Those scratches might have been made at some other time, in some other way. Nothing in the bedroom would be incriminating.

Then Tarn stiffened, fought with a chattering panic as he heard Parks give a triumphant cry.

"We got him! Hanged if we ain't! Look at that! There's where it went!"

Tarn shoved himself forward. And in the doorway, Parks was confronting him.

"Wh—what is it?" Tarn heard himself stammering. "Something—interesting? Y—you found something?"

"Hanged if we didn't," Parks retorted.

The men were all crowding at Tarn, shoving him, gripping him roughly. He tried to resist.

"Take your hands off me! What is this? What got lost? You said downstairs that something got lost."

"That gun fired two bullets," Parks said grimly. "One went into Conlin. But one missed him. Down in the livin' room we were lookin' for it. All the winders closed, so where did it go? You can't shoot a gun in a closed room, with-

out hittin' *something*, can you? So I knew he didn't get killed down there. But up here in your room. . . . Come take a look!"

They shoved Tarn into the bedroom. It wasn't dim with starlight now; it was bright with daylight.

"So you were asleep all night in that little bed, eh?" Parks was saying. "You didn't know a thing about what was goin' on, even when a bullet went right through you, eh? Try tellin' that to the sheriff, and to the judge and jury! Don't worry—you'll get your chance, you rotten killer!"

Wordless with terror, Tarn's mind swung back—how he had stood by the bureau, and Conlin had come forward into the center of the room. The first shot had missed him. Then later, Tarn in the starlit dimness had pulled the bedcovers from where had tossed them off, pulled them over him as he got back into bed. And this morning he had leaped out and rushed downstairs with Mrs. Greer.

"So you're not talkin'?" Parks' voice was saying. "How could you? Ain't nothin' to say."

Numbly Parks was staring at the bullet-hole in the sheet of the narrow little bed, almost at its center, where the lost bullet had buried itself in his mattress!

Bullets Can Talk!



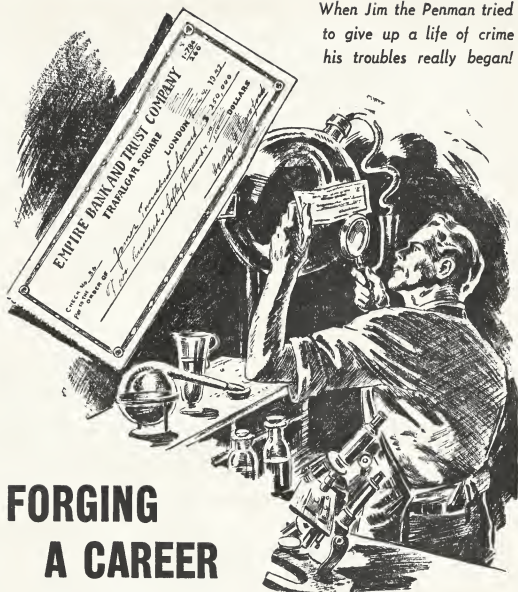
bullets are given microscopic examination it is possible accurately to determine whether or not they have come from any given gun.

When a revolver is fired, the empty shell remains in the gun. In automatic pistols, however, each empty shells is ejected after firing. These shells are hurled from the weapon at an angle that varies according to the make and calibre of the gun. Thus, if the make of a murder weapon is known, by the pattern of empty ejected shells that lie on the floor, it is frequently possible to tell almost exactly where the killer was standing (or sitting) when he fired the gun!

Thus a killer's own bullets can be turned to testify against him and—as frequently happens—condemn him to the just and proper punishment he deserves!

IN order to give a bullet "twist", so that it will travel nose-foremost all the way and not start tumbling end over end, the barrels of guns have machined into them a series of grooves and ridges known as "rifling." No two guns are ever rifled exactly alike, and when a gun is fired, powder pitting and wear makes them even more strongly individualized. As a result, when

*When Jim the Penman tried
to give up a life of crime
his troubles really began!*



FORGING A CAREER

By SAMUEL MINES

ANY man who has ever been handed a ticket by a traffic cop must have more than a suppressed sympathy for the gay and dashing crooks—the Raffles and the Robin Hoods—who outwit the duller minions of the law. What man, however law-abiding, has not sometime or other, smarted under the

heavy thumb of authority.

Such a one must have been James Townshead Saward, the most brilliant forger of all time, the man called by his associates "Jim the Penman."

Saward was no product of Limehouse, London's criminal breeding slum. He came of a good and old English family,

THE TRUE STORY OF A MASTER SWINDLER!

was educated and reared as a gentleman and took a law degree. His adoption of crime as a life work, therefore, was not a matter of hunger or other circumstances, nor even an obscure idea of revenge upon society, which so often seems a factor. No, James Townshead Saward became a criminal simply because it seemed exciting to him to pit his wits against all the awesome machinery of the law. And for a while there, he had quite a good thing of it.

Having got his degree in law, Saward opened his office in The Temple, this being practically mandatory for a London barrister. But he paid little attention to the practice of law. Instead he set up a very complete laboratory in his rooms and presently was deep in a complicated series of tests involving paper, ink, acids, printing plates and similar gadgets connected with the business of checks, drafts and letters of credit.

Apparently Saward's college education had not been confined to the dry and musty perusal of cases in torts. He was enormously talented and astonishingly versatile. He was a remarkable artist, a top-notch chemist and a highly skilled engraver. He could have made a brilliant professional career out of any of these skills. He chose, instead, to lump them all together in the strange career of a forger.

FOR some time he did nothing but study and analyze the nature of the inks and paper used in checks, notes, letters of credit and similar valuable documents. After much work, he perfected a chemical for removing the ink from a check—a process called by the London underground "cleaning"—far more efficiently than ever before.

This was far more difficult than it sounds, for not only were the inks permanent, but the paper itself was so sensitized that it would be affected at once by any ink-removing chemicals used.

Saward's process, obviously kept secret, removed the ink completely without affecting the color or texture of the paper beneath.

All the pseudo-barrister had to do

now was make contact with the underworld and let it get around that he was open for business. Shortly the crooks were coming in and bringing him their checks to "clean" so they could be raised to a comfortable sum over that originally issued. Having had legal training, Saward knew how to charge for his services and he charged a very nice slice of the amount to which the check was raised. At only four or five checks a day he was soon doing a business which would have caused him plenty of income tax grief today.

There was only one fly in the ointment. Being a shrewd cookie, Saward realized that his secret was shared by too many people. Too many crooks knew that James Townshead Saward, barrister, was only a front. And crooks being generally considered unreliable, he had a feeling that should one be cornered by Scotland Yard and offered a choice between talking and mouldering in a dungeon, there would be plenty of talking. It was the one annoyance of an otherwise profitable and pleasant career and Saward worried about it.

One day a detective called upon him and began asking questions. The officer had nothing definite to go upon, Saward realized that after only a moment. Nor was there anything incriminating around to spot. But there must have been some reason for the visit. Why should Scotland Yard pick him out of hundreds of London lawyers for suspicion? The time had come, Saward felt, to move on. So he quietly closed his office and vanished. James Townshead Saward, barrister, was seen and heard no more.

For a year nothing was heard of him and no sign of any activity appeared. Then London awoke to a new and menacing personality, Jim the Penman.

Saward it was, but he gave the name of Captain Bevan when he entered a big London bank. He was richly dressed and both his speech and appearance was distinctly of the upper class—the sort to inspire confidence in a bank official.

As Captain Bevan he spoke of a trip to America and purchased a letter of

credit on a New York bank for \$10,000. To pay for it, he drew out a bulging wallet and peeled off crisp new banknotes of unquestioned authenticity.

At that time, the letter of credit business was unregulated and completely up to the individual bank concerned. Each bank printed its own forms and adopted whatever safeguards it could for its own protection. The letter of credit Captain Bevan took away with him must have made him laugh. It was a simple printed form on plain white paper, with the amount filled in by hand in ink. He took it home, added one zero and thereby raised the amount to \$100,000 which same he got in good American dollars at the New York bank and made the neat profit of \$90,000, less the cost of an ocean voyage.

WHEN the letter of credit returned to London for payment there was consternation in British banking circles. At once the Bankers' Association called an emergency meeting to adopt protective measures.

The first step, of course, was to abandon the policy of every bank for itself and to adopt a uniform blank with a special paper. The paper would be watermarked for a certain cash amount. Thus, if a bank sold a letter of credit for \$450 the teller would use a form watermarked "Not Over \$500" so that even if an attempt should be made to raise the amount, the watermark in the paper itself would be a safeguard. The same system is still used today for checks, so it obviously had merit. The bankers of that day thought it was wonderful and they congratulated themselves upon their own cleverness. They had yet to learn about Jim the Penman.

The watermark gave him no trouble. Pretty soon a London bank got back from Madrid a note which was part of a letter of credit. This note had been issued for \$10 and raised to \$100, watermark and all. The other notes began coming in until the letter of credit was completely used up. And then they added up the bad news. The letter of credit had been raised, in total, from

\$21,500 to \$210,500. And the watermark, which read, on the main letter, "Not Over \$25,000" had likewise been raised—so perfectly that the best chemists called in by the bank were unable to tell how it was done!

Jim the Penman not only made just under \$180,000 but also got a leisurely trip around the world, for each note had been cashed in a different city, including New York, Rio de Janeiro, Yokohama, Cape Town and Melbourne.

There was gloom in the financial marts of London when the bad news was in. Another emergency meeting was in order and the result was that some unsung genius came up with a new invention—the check perforating machine. Now there were two safeguards. First the check was watermarked not to exceed a certain amount. Then the actual amount of the check was punched into the paper in the manner of all modern checks. This made erasure or removal by chemical means absolutely impossible, for no one could possibly write again over the perforated section of the paper.

As a final body blow to the check raisers, special sensitive paper was used and a special ink whose composition was so secret that they were sure no forger could break it down. And so again the meeting broke up in a more cheerful mood than it had begun.

There was peace and quiet in London banks for awhile—less than a year. Then it seems that Jim the Penman decided to take another world cruise—for which he needed some money. A check came into a London bank for collection and it bore the very respectable sum of \$250,000. But when the books were consulted, it was found that this check had been issued for \$25,000!

Consternation reigned again. The check looked so perfect that it took a chemist complete with microscope, scalpel, tweezers and chemicals to find out what had been done. The entire perforated section of the check had been carefully cut out. In some unknown manner, Saward had analyzed the pulp content of the paper and made a new

piece exact in every way, including the water mark which fitted and blended into the lines of the old watermark perfectly!

He then rolled the new piece into the check, beveling the edges so that there would be no extra thickness at the joint, and flattening it perfectly. With a check writer such as the banks themselves used, he then perforated it for the new amount and the job was done. It was painstaking work even for so talented a pair of hands, but the profit, \$225,000, was hardly chicken feed.

THE incredible skill of the job scared the bankers so badly that some, in panic, wanted to give up letters of credit and checks altogether. Certainly there seemed to be no defense against this wizard of pen and ink.

It would have been an interesting sight, all the great banks of the world and the vast machinery of the law surrendering to one man, but something else happened. Jim the Penman got tired of the whole thing.

He'd had his fun and excitement, he had managed to save about \$400,000 in spite of high living, and he no longer wanted to run the risks of detection and arrest. So he bought himself a lavish estate, hired a young and pretty housekeeper and retired to the bucolic life of

a country squire.

All might have gone serenely for him now except for the one thing which proves no man is ever quite master of his own fate. His former associates, the London crooks for whom he had begun his career of "cleaning" checks, found him out. They paid him a visit. They still had checks to be cleaned, he was still the best in the business. In vain he protested.

"I'm through with it all, boys," he told them.

"No, you're not. You work for us or we'll jolly well turn you in."

Saward had no choice. Though he feared and resented it, he was forced to do the work for them. Then the thing he dreaded happened. One of the check passers was arrested. Put on the grill he sang for the cops and the finger pointed directly at James Townshead Saward.

Although he was out of practice as a lawyer, Saward handled his own defense at the trial and being a brilliant man, put up a magnificent fight. But the cards were stacked against him. The evidence was conclusive and behind it was all the weight of the powerful banks.

He was found guilty and given the stiff penalty of life imprisonment. So ended the career that was forged.



MICHAEL SHAYNE, THE FIGHTING REDHEAD, AT HIS BEST IN

MURDER IS A HABIT

A New Book-Length Novel

By BRETT HALLIDAY

In the Summer

MYSTERY BOOK MAGAZINE

NOW ON SALE — 196 PAGES, ONLY 25c EVERYWHERE!



STILL OF NIGHT

By WILL OURSLER

IT IS quiet now. The quivering hush of country twilight. Here on the porch, I jot down these notes by the light streaking through the window from inside the house.

There are only the two of us, alone in this lodge of mine, this retreat from the sounds of the city, from the world of hurrying people and grinding machines. Only the two of us, sitting here in silence, each lost in his own small thoughts, his own trivial terror.

It is strange I should have had a love affair. The young scientist, I was, devoted to my research in the laboratory at Columbia. Romance had no part in

my plans. There was no time.

I should have known, I suppose. Elemental force is always mathematically stronger than the individual struggling against it.

It was so natural—almost inevitable—my meeting with Iris, Dr. Haley's young and lovely wife. I knew that, of course. We were working together, Haley and I, on my latest experiment. He had asked me to supper, to dine with them.

A tall, ponderous man, Dr. Haley. By the thinning, grayish mop of hair, the drawn lines of his face I put him in his sixties at least. She was in her early thirties.

"Only the two of us, sitting here in silence..."

"Iris," Haley was saying, "here's Bob Thorne. You've heard me speak of him."

I had never seen anyone quite like her, anyone so close to the essence of femininity. A Dresden doll which by some miracle of science had been given the spark of life and blood in its porcelain veins.

I scarcely heard Haley as he made the introductions. I was looking at her, drinking in loveliness, the spell of innocent blue eyes with their secret, wordless search for excitement.

It was insanity, I admit. Yet it seemed we both knew. It seemed she had to know, as well as I.

I watched her that evening in the candlelight of the dining room. There were other guests, faculty members and their wives. I was pleased she gave me the place of honor at her right.

SHE was the perfect hostess, with her easy flow of casual chit-chat.

"Yes, my dear, we saw the Silver Bell only the other night. Splendid. Except Dorothy Hammond does overplay, don't you think? . . . Have you seen it, Mrs. Whiting? I'm sure you'd enjoy—"

Yet there was something in her tone, even in these meaningless words of polite conversation. I said little during that dinner. My eyes hardly left her. Except for one brief, searching glance, she gave no sign that she realized.

Yet I was right that she knew. When we rose from the table, she stood close to me, her eyes looking up into mine. So softly I could hardly hear, she said: "About four tomorrow—at the Cloisters?"

I gazed a moment, bewildered. Then I nodded. She smiled, that bewitching little smile, and turned to the others again.

It was a magic thing, this romance of ours. A thing of trembling, stolen moments. But it was evil, too. Always with us was the nightmare fear of discovery, of smashing the world of this man she pretended to love, this man with whom I worked, whose friendship I claimed.

Always the guilt, as he and I worked together. Always sickening shame at his praise.

"Magnificent, Thorne!" His words

boomed out as he read some report of mine. "We've made progress. We will have the answer soon."

Then he was going away. She told me in the afternoon, as we walked together, holding hands like kids, in the park. I thought of the lodge of mine across the river in Jersey. She and I had spent one afternoon there, days before.

"Come with me," I urged. "The lodge—there's no one around, no close neighbors, no gossips. We could have this time together, just the two of us."

I looked into her face. I could read desire in those blue eyes. I wanted to take her into my arms and hold her.

"If I can, dear," she whispered. "Call me at five—I'll let you know. He won't be in until six."

When I called, she sounded gay, full of laughter.

"I may be a little delayed. I think he's taking a later train. You—you go on out to the lodge. I'll dine with him, go with him to the train. After that, darling—"

She would take the car and drive out, she said. She knew the way. It would not be long.

I was in high spirits as I hung up. I climbed into my own car, drove across the George Washington Bridge, out the main road, turned off the side road to the lodge.

I wanted to open up the place, to get a fire started. I thought there was plenty of time. I thought it would be about nine before she arrived.

But it was much earlier when I heard the car coming up the driveway and draw to a stop at the door. Iris must have got away early, I decided. I hurried to meet her.

But I was wrong. I heard his voice in the car.

"She's not coming, Thorne. Not to see you or anyone, ever. You see, I came back without her knowing, and I heard the call. But then I knew about it anyway. I've been checking up. Walk backward—toward the porch."

We are sitting here now, he and I. He agreed I might make these notes, my last scientific report. My palms are wet with sweat. The gun in his hand points at my heart. I cannot guess at which unthinkable second that final blast will shatter the stillness of the night.

It was a punishing blow, with all the force of Soong's muscles riding behind it



Happy Doomsday to You!

It takes more than an abacus to add two and two when lovely Lotus Wang uses her wiles to frame Henry Soong!

IT IS written that Death wears many names and many disguises. But no man could have guessed that Death, on this particular afternoon, bore the face and form of Lotus Wang.

Lotus was dazzlingly beautiful, subtly fragrant and exquisitely dressed in something from New York, a creation

of clinging gray silk cut to emphasize and enhance the daintiness of her figure. Her only jewelry was a silver and amethyst pin cunningly chosen to match her little purple hat and to stress, by contrast, the darkness of her almond eyes, the smooth clear ivory of her complexion and the startling blackness of

By ROBERT LESLIE BELLEM

her hair. And Henry Soong, admiring her, had not the remotest idea that he was gazing upon the seeds of his own destruction.

She sat across from Henry in the cool dark intimacy of a private booth at the Golden Dragon Tearoom and smiled at him wistfully, like a troubled school-girl, so that it made a small sharpened hatchet of pleasurable pain chop at his heart. The unseen hatchet was always there whenever he was close to lovely Lotus Wang. Which was why, these past few weeks, he had avoided her as much as possible without seeming rude. After all, she was married. Her husband was not only Henry's immediate superior, but his friend as well—and a jealous man by nature.

"What a happy accident, Henry, meeting you here like this!" Lotus murmured, raising her thimble cup of mild rice wine and sipping its warm pungency. Her voice had the quality of silver bells, throaty and crystal-sweet, haunting and disturbing. "How sad it would have been if you were forced to celebrate the occasion alone." A shadow came into her eyes. "Loneliness is not good for any man—or any woman."

He stirred uneasily, not quite sure of her meaning, yet quite certain of the reply he should make.

"And what could you possibly know about loneliness?" he said finally. His tone was light, bantering.

"More, perhaps, than you realize." Again she lifted the fragile thimble cup. "To your good fortune, Henry."

She drank with her head far back, so that he couldn't help noting the flawless contours of her throat.

HE himself needed no wine to make the blood race fast in his veins. Lotus Wang's nearness was intoxicating enough; and beyond that, only this morning he had been promoted from bookkeeping machine operator to receiving teller at the Chinatown branch of the Merchants' First National.

For any young man as aspiring, as conscientious and as ambitiously hard-working as Henry Soong, such an unexpected promotion was a dizzying symbol of success. It was a badge of merit and an official recognition of his honesty and integrity all rolled into one.

Directly after bank closing, the moment he had balanced his first day's cash accounts to the penny, he had made straight for the quiet luxury of the Golden Dragon, there to partake of tea and holiday rice cakes after the fashion of his fathers—his single concession to Oriental tradition. In every other respect he was American by birth and schooling and thought. Then, here in the Golden Dragon, he had encountered Lotus Wang, who was just as American as he was; and, of course, just as Chinese.

He poured more hot wine into her cup and his own. Somehow his hand touched her long slender fingers, and the contact set the unseen hatchet nicking all the harder at his heart.

"When did you hear the news?" he asked her.

"George phoned me at the apartment." She meant George Wang, her husband, chief teller at the Chinatown branch. "He was very pleased, Henry. You know he's the one who recommended you for the new job."

"I'm grateful. He's a good friend to have, and an influential one."

She looked wistful again, and the shadow stole back into her slanted eyes.

"It's the bank that has the influence," she murmured.

"Am I supposed to understand that remark?"

"I hope you understand it. Are you not George's friend? And mine? Have you not been our guest many times? Though not so often this last month or so."

He made an apologetic gesture. "I've been pretty busy." There would be no wisdom, he reflected, in telling her how she had begun to affect him emotionally. An honorable man does not permit himself to covet another man's woman.

She shrugged. "Busy! Don't follow in George's footsteps, Henry. He's more a husband to the Merchants' First National than to me. We've been married less than two years, and already he stays downtown five evenings out of seven." A hint of bitterness marred the silver-bell purity of her voice. "The bank, the bank, always it's the bank!"

"He loves you," Henry Soong said loyally, his tone gentle and a little envious. "He works hard so that you may have nice things. An expensive apart-

ment, expensive clothes."

She lapsed for a moment into liquid sing-song Cantonese. "It is written that love cannot live under the same roof with discontent and neglect." Then, she said in English: "Expensive apartment, expensive clothes! Do you think they can replace the affection George denies me?" Abruptly she stood up. "Henry, take me home."

"Why, of course."

He paid the chit, then took her out to his shabby coupe. The uneasiness he had felt all the time she was talking to him in the tearoom grew within him as he drove her up the long hill to her apartment house. She sat close to him, her body-warmth seeping into him and her exotic fragrance making him a trifle drunken at the wheel.

When he parked and got out to hold the door open for her, he sensed what would come next—sensed it and was afraid, suddenly, for reasons he scarcely knew how to analyze. Death, perhaps, carries an aura. But what man is given the power to foresee the future?

She said what he had intuitively expected her to say.

"Come up with me, Henry. I need someone to talk to, someone who can understand."

"But—but George—"

"Didn't I say he phoned me from the bank? He has a ledger to audit." She looked at the red sun, less than an hour high from the horizon. "He won't be home until later. Much later," she added resentfully.

"That's just the point," Henry Soong said. "If he won't come home until much later, should I be in your apartment, alone with you? Would it look well?"

Her eyes searched his. "Scared, Henry? Scared of gossip? Of scandal? Of George?"

"Well no, but—"

Again she reverted to Cantonese. "If a thing be innocent, the tongues of malice are stilled before they can start wagging." She looked down, demurely. "Or do you think I'm wicked to invite you?" She lifted her oval face. "If you think that of me, then go away quickly. . . . But you don't, Henry. You're not that kind of a man. Your thoughts are not evil."

CERTAINLY not!" he said, embarrassed.

And yet, for all his embarrassment, he began to have a vague and undefined feeling that there was something behind all this, something below the surface, an undercurrent as swift and treacherous as a riptide in the bay. Just as quickly he suppressed the feeling. Studying Lotus, he decided that it was unworthy, unfair and unjust. He saw the naive appeal in her glance, and he told himself that his premonitions were absurd and groundless.

"Well, Henry?"

He took her arm, decisively. "Forgive me for being a prig and a fool."

They went inside, and an automatic elevator lifted them to the sixth floor. "Maybe George will come home early," he said, "and we can all go out celebrating my promotion. Maybe we can phone him at the bank and persuade him to leave that ledger for tomorrow."

"Phone him? Oh, no! You know how he dislikes to be disturbed when he's working."

Lotus keyed the door open. Inside, the apartment was a curiously opulent combination of Oriental and streamlined modernistic Occidental decor. She pointed to a cellarette.

"Mix some drinks, darling, while I get into something comfortable."

"Okay." He wondered about the "darling," then dismissed it as a meaningless and empty endearment; a word nobody took seriously these days.

Lotus paused at the door of her bedroom.

"And Henry—skip the rice wine. Let's have Scotch. Rice wine reminds me too much that I'm Chinese—and Chinese women are slaves. I'm no slave. I'm American. And free."

She left him then, and he stared thoughtfully after her. This talk of slavery, and freedom, had a curious ambiguity that bothered him. Especially the freedom part. What, he asked himself, had she meant by that?

He found out soon enough. She returned wearing a crimson silk kimono loosely sashed around the waist but not otherwise fastened at all. When she walked, there was a flash of sleek lithe legs, as delicately tapered as yellow jade sculpture. In leaning over a teakwood table to pick up a cigarette, her

kimona drifted tantalizing open at the throat. As if unaware of any indiscretion she straightened and smiled.

"Light, Henry?"

He struck a match and extended it. Just as quickly she blew it out and tossed the cigarette away.

"Darling, don't be so obtuse!"

Her voice was husky, demanding. And suddenly she was in his arms, pressing herself against him, holding up her parted red lips for his kiss.

Henry Soong knew a fleeting instant of shock, of stiffened bewilderment, before his lips automatically swooped to hers. Then a sort of tingling electrical thrill replaced the bewilderment when his embrace tightened around her yielding form. All the repression of the past few weeks, all the barriers of inhibition he had carefully erected, were smashed down by the surge of emotional storm now seething through him.

From the apartment's doorway a man said in harsh Cantonese:

"You vile son of unspeakable camels!"

George Wang strode into the room, a tall, thick-set man, round of face, stout without pudginess, slanted eyes narrowed to shiny slits of rage. His hand fell upon Henry Soong's shoulder, yanking him backward off-balance and spinning him halfway around.

Lotus screamed faintly, cowering into a corner and pulling the edges of her kimona tightly closed. Her husband took three steps toward her and slapped her across the left cheek so hard that it sounded like a whip crack, and left the imprints of his fingers on her bloodless complexion.

"George—George," she whimpered, "I—"

"Quiet!" he said through his teeth, and turned to Henry Soong. This time he spoke in English. "You're contemptible. I'm going to kill you."

He made for the teakwood table, wrenched a drawer out, snatched up a gun. Lotus leaped, clawing, trying to get the weapon.

"George—no! You can't! You mustn't! They'll send you to the gas chamber! George, please don't—please—please!"

"The gas chamber!" Mocking, he drew back. "Be honest. Henry's the one you're trying to protect, not me. You're in love with him, aren't you?"

"I don't care one tiny bit about him."

"Lotus!" Henry Soong choked, and when she turned away from him, he said, "Look, George, this is all a mistake."

"Is it? I suppose I didn't see you holding Lotus in your arms, kissing her." Wang leered unpleasantly. "Maybe you'd like me to give her a divorce so you can marry her. That would be the American way, wouldn't it? But we happen to be Chinese as well as Americans."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Everything. I don't intend to let everybody along Grant Street know I allowed a younger man to take my wife away from me. I would be a laughing stock. I would lose face."

SOONG knew what he meant. To an Oriental, "face" is a word that represents a man's dignity, his honor, his standing in the community and the respect of his neighbors.

"But George—"

"You dare call me by name?" Then, to Lotus: "Go to your room."

Meekly obedient, she went.

"Now then," Wang said, and raised the gun. "I'm going to put an end to this."

Henry Soong steeled himself. "By shooting me?"

"Only if you insist. There's another way to settle it."

"Meaning what?"

"Your promise to stay away from Lotus from now on."

"You have my word for that." A wry smile twisted Henry Soong's lips. "Believe me, I've learned my lesson."

"Yes? But you are young. And it has been wisely said that the young man's memory is short where a beautiful woman is concerned. I want more than your word. I want your bond. Go to that desk in the corner. Sit down and write what I tell you to write."

"Now wait a minute!"

"Write or die. The choice is yours. Make it quickly."

Henry Soong hesitated, then went to the desk and uncapped his fountain pen. You couldn't argue with a gun, he reflected. And as for never seeing Lotus again—well, he could endure that too. She had got him into this mess, and then

left him to take the consequences. She had even said she didn't care one bit about him. That hurt most of all.

He looked up. "Well?"

Slowly and meticulously, Wang began to dictate.

"I, Henry Soong, confess that I have stolen funds from the bank where I am employed—"

"No!" the younger man shouted. "That's a lie. I'm no thief!"

"You tried to steal my wife."

"I deny that. And anyhow, I've never taken a dime from—"

Wang grinned. "Write it. Otherwise I'll kill you and call in the police and say I shot you in defense of my home. Lotus will back me up. I'll be acquitted. The unwritten law, you know. Well, Henry?"

"You can't do this. You can't!"

"Perhaps it is not as bad as it seems. Write, and then I will explain. 'I, Henry Soong, confess that I stole the funds from the bank where I am employed. Now I go where justice cannot overtake me.' Leave it undated, and sign it."

"No!"

"Don't worry. I won't use it against you, as long as you stay away from Lotus. I won't even have you fired from the bank. All I want is a club over your head. Then, if you so much as look at Lotus from now on, I'll take a few thousand dollars from the vaults and mail in your confession. You'll either have to jump town or be arrested, jailed. Clever of me, eh?"

"Clever!" Henry Soong spat out the word. "Devious, you mean." He made a bitter mouth.

Wang laughed. "I accept that as a compliment. We Chinese are indeed devious." He emphasized the "we." Then his gun menaced Henry. "Now sign."

Henry Soong swore—and signed.

But it was not until later that same night, in the privacy of his own barren little bachelor flat, that he realized the jeopardy to which he had exposed himself.

It had been written that a fool's infatuation is a spade with which he digs his own grave; and Henry Soong learned the wisdom of this when he grew tired
[Turn Page]

Reducing Specialist says:



"Thanks to the Spot Reducer I lost four inches around the hips and three inches around the waistline. It's amazing." Mary Martin, Long Island City, N. Y.

LOSE WEIGHT

where it shows most

REDUCE
most any part of the body with

SPOT REDUCER

Like a magic wand, the "Spot Reducer" obeys your every wish. Most any part of your body where it is loose and



Miss Nancy Maco, Bronx, N. Y., says: "I went from size 12 dress to a size 12 with the use of the Spot Reducer. I am glad I used it."

flabby, wherever you have extra weight and inches, the "Spot Reducer" can aid you in acquiring a youthful slender and graceful figure. The beauty of this scientifically designed Reducer is that the method is so simple and easy, the results quick, sure and harmless. No exercises or strict diets. No steam-baths, drugs or laxatives. Thousands have lost weight this way—in hips, abdomen, legs, arms, neck, buttocks, etc. The same method used by stage, screen and radio personalities and leading reducing salons. The "Spot Reducer" can be used in your spare time, in the privacy of your own room. It breaks down fatty tissues, tones the muscles and flesh, and the increased, awakened blood circulation carries away waste fat. Two weeks after using the "Spot Reducer," look in the mirror and see a more glamorous, better, firmer, slimmer figure that will delight you. You have nothing to lose but weight for the "Spot Reducer" is sold on a



Marie Hammel, New York, N. Y., says: "I used to wear a size 20 dress, now I wear size 14, thanks to the Spot Reducer. It was fun and I enjoyed it."

MONEY BACK GUARANTEE with a 10-DAY FREE TRIAL

If the "Spot Reducer" doesn't do the wonders for you as it has for others, if you don't lose weight and inches where you want to lose it most, if you're not 100% delighted with the results, your money will be returned at once.

FREE A Jar of Special Formula Body Massage Cream will be included FREE with your order for the "Spot Reducer."

MAIL COUPON NOW!

The "Spot Reducer" Co., Dept. TF-7
871 Broad St., Newark, New Jersey

Send me at once, for \$3 cash, check or money order, the "Spot Reducer" and your famous Special Formula Body Massage Cream, postpaid. If I am not 100% satisfied, my money will be refunded.

Name

Address

City State

☐ I enclose \$3.00. Send the Giant Size Body Massage Cream with my Spot Reducer.

of restlessly pacing his living room and absently switched on the radio for the eleven o'clock news cast. As the set warmed and the announcer faded in full, Henry Soong's mouth went abruptly dry and his mind seemed stunned, incapable of rational thought, as if he had been struck by a pole-ax.

"—robbery occurred about thirty minutes ago. According to police reports, the bank vault's time-lock mechanism was either faulty or had not been properly set at the close of the business day. Obviously operating with some previous knowledge of the combination, the thief or thieves used no mechanical force or explosives to open the huge steel door, but turned the dials to their proper sequences and thus gained access to the bank's reserves of currency.

"No estimate has yet been made of the total amount lost, although it is assumed that it will run between one hundred and a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. It is also assumed that the watchman came upon the scene during the actual commission of the crime and attempted to interfere, an act of bravery which cost him his life.

"In an interview, one official of the Merchants' First National stated that this is the first robbery of its Chinatown branch since the office was established more than thirty years ago. One of the most unusual aspects of the affair is that the electrical burglar alarm system failed to function, indicating the possibility that the circuits had been tampered with, and pointing to the conclusion that it was an inside job."

HENRY SOONG'S breath escaped in a long agonized hiss. Then he jumped to the radio and switched it off savagely. He was sweating. Perspiration stood out in droplets on his forehead, and his palms felt clammy wet. That insane confession George Wang had badgered out of him—why had it been tonight, of all nights? And why had some bank robber chosen this same particular time to loot the Chinatown branch of the Merchants' First National, and to murder the watchman?

Of all the fantastic, demoniac coincidences, this was the most devilish that had ever happened to a man. It placed

Henry Soong completely and utterly at Wang's mercy. Wang had the power, now, not only to send him to prison, but to the lethal chamber. It was like an ugly and impossible nightmare.

Not that Wang would use this power, Soong tried to convince himself. That would be too inhuman, even for Wang. Just the same, as long as Soong's written confession existed, the danger remained. Suppose Wang accidentally lost it? Suppose it found its way into the hands of the police? Suppose—

"I've got to get it back!" Henry Soong whispered. "Somehow and some way, I've got to make him give it to me!"

He raced out of the flat, pelted downstairs to the street, hurled himself toward a nearby vacant lot where he kept his coupe parked after dark.

Tendrils of fog were beginning to drift in from the bay, curling and eddying like the tentacles of ghostly squids. On the next street over, an ancient cable car clattered and rattled downhill with its flat wheels banging the rails. Soong kicked his motor to life and headed for the long steep grade that led to his destination.

The fog was much thicker when he reached the apartment building, but the moisture on Henry Soong's face was not mist; it was cold perspiration distilled by inner turmoil. Nervously he pressed the button that sent the automatic elevator sliding up to the sixth floor, and his footsteps were swift as they carried him toward George Wang's door.

Gaining it, he started to knock. Then he heard voices on the other side, and his fist stopped in mid-motion.

"You have the bottle of wine and Soong's confession?" That was Wang, gruff, brusque.

"Yes, George," Lotus answered.

"You understand how to use the powder I gave you?"

"Yes. Are—are you sure it will work?"

"Of course I'm sure. When I scheme a thing, I leave no loopholes. I leave nothing to chance."

She sounded a little shaky. "You said that about the bank, too. But the watchman saw you."

"Forget the watchman! He was off schedule or I wouldn't have had to kill him. The fault was his, not mine. Now

stop arguing and be on your way. And remember, when you are positive Soong is dead, plant the confession in his hand and come straight home."

"Yes, George. I leave it in his hand after he dies, then come straight home, letting nobody see me." She spoke as a school pupil speaks, a pupil who has learned a lesson by rote, until every last syllable is engraved upon her memory. "I'll go at once."

Outside in the silent corridor, Henry Soong lurched drunkenly from the doorway. His mind was a confused chaos of spinning, whirling thoughts; of incredulity and sickened understanding. Wang was the one who had robbed the bank, slain the watchman. It had all been part of a plan, a pattern laid out well in advance.

And Lotus herself was a design in that pattern. She had lured Soong to her apartment this afternoon for one purpose and one purpose only—to compromise him and induce him to kiss her, so that her husband's arrival would be timed for the exact moment of that kiss. A judas kiss, it had been. A death kiss.

And the scene which had followed—that, too, had been contrived. It was the old badger game with a new twist. George Wang had extorted a false robbery confession from Soong, planning, later that same night, to loot the bank's Chinatown branch. Presently the confession would be left in Henry Soong's lifeless hand, placing the crime at his own doorstep.

And he would not be alive to protest, or deny, or even to explain. The Wangs intended to murder him with poisoned wine. It would seem to be suicide, a guilty man's act of expiation and atonement. For one brief thrill, for one fleeting instant of ecstasy, for the single tingling pressure of his own lips on Lotus Wang's red ones, he was to pay with his life.

It was too late, now, to reach the elevator without being seen. The door of the Wang apartment was already opening. Soong noticed a staircase and ran toward it. Then, panting, he raced downward. He had to get away. He had to escape, before the dragon jaws [Turn Page]

ACE Hollywood Experts
WILL TRAIN YOU AT HOME...
NOW YOU CAN MAKE GOOD IN
RADIO
TELEVISION
ELECTRONICS



Through Practical Experiments With

10

BIG KITS
R.T.A.
Gives you!

YOU WORK ON REAL EQUIPMENT

10
BIG KITS
R.T.A.
Gives you!

You Do
Scores of
Practical
Experiments

Illustrated above are only a few of the many job-exercises you do, through RTA's "shop-type" home training method. You build a TRF Receiver, a High-Frequency Converter, a 6-tube AC-DC Superhet Receiver, plus dozens of other interesting jobs. These jobs give you actual SHOP EXPERIENCE necessary to your success.

FILL OUT
COUPON
AND MAIL
TODAY!

Opportunities Wide Open

400 MILLION new radio and television sets will be built within ten years. 72 MILLION dollars are being spent RIGHT NOW for radio repairs alone! When you are trained by RTA's Hollywood Experts, you too can qualify for big, interesting GOOD-PAYING technician jobs, or YOUR OWN profitable radio-television repair business.

Extra Cash in Spare Time

RTA's Hollywood Experts show you how to earn welcome EXTRA CASH, while you learn. In fact, like many RTA students, you may actually get MORE spare time work than you can handle.

25 Years of Success

RTA's long years of experience assure you quickest progress. If you are at all mechanically inclined, RTA can teach YOU to MAKE GOOD in Radio-Television.

SO GET THE FACTS!
SEND FOR FREE
30-PAGE BOOK
TODAY!



APPROVED FOR VETERANS

RADIO TRAINING ASSOC. OF AMERICA, DEPT. TFO
5620 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood 28, Calif.
Send FREE BOOK showing how to make good in Radio-Television through training by Hollywood experts.

NAME _____ AGE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____

Check box if VETERAN of World War II ☐

of the trap closed on him.

Driving through the mist, he tried to consider the situation objectively, tried to chart the course he should take. Flight? He weighed it and found it wanting. That confession had been craftily worded for just such a contingency. "I go where justice cannot overtake me." That could cover his death by apparent suicide, or it could cover his running away. In the latter case, the police would eventually capture him no matter how far he fled. The law is a relentless pursuer.

Nor did he dare give himself up to the police and tell them what really had happened. Nobody would believe him. He had been too thoroughly framed by George and Lotus Wang. When his confession turned up he would have to admit he had written it, but he could never prove that the Wangs had forced him to. No sane man voluntarily signs his own death warrant.

As he thought of the things he had overheard the Wangs saying, he realized he was the victim of combined Oriental cunning and Occidental trickery. The badger game they had worked on him—that had been strictly American. But the extorted confession was a devious example of Asiatic guile. How could he, Henry Soong, hope to meet and combat and overcome such a mixture?

And yet, was he himself not American-Chinese?

Abruptly his eyes narrowed. And just as abruptly he sent the coupe roaring through the night toward his own shabby flat. There was just one remote thread of chance, one fragile strand by which he might save himself. But it had to be grasped swiftly. There was little time for preparation.

Five precious minutes of that time he spent in an obscure Chinese apothecary shop, making a purchase whose substance would not be found listed in any American pharmacopoeia. Then again he headed homeward. Parking on the vacant lot, he plunged headlong to the walk-up building where he lived.

He was not an instant too soon. As he gained the second floor landing he saw Lotus Wang just turning away from his door. He summoned all his acting ability.

"Lotus! What are you doing here?"

"Oh, darling, I was afraid you'd gone away somewhere." She was an accomplished actress. "I knocked, and you didn't let me in. Henry, I had to come to you!"

"Why?" he said gently. Then, unlocking the door and making a light, he ushered her in.

She faced him. "I've left George."

"You what?"

"I've left him. Forever. Darling, please don't despise me for the way I seemed to turn against you this afternoon. I didn't mean it, Henry. I had to say I didn't care for you. I had to lie, or he would have k-killed you."

"I understand."

"I knew you would! And now—well, I'm here. George doesn't suspect. And before he does, we'll be gone. I want you to take me away, Henry. To some other city, maybe some other country. Mexico, perhaps. Or somewhere in South America. What does it matter, as long as we can be together? Darling, I love you so much!"

He played out the scene. He took her in his arms and bruised her lips with his own. Funny, he thought, how he could still get a thrill out of kissing her, even though he knew she had come here to poison him.

Presently he let her go.

"Are you quite sure of all this, Lotus?" he murmured. "Are you certain you prefer me to your husband? You realize he represents comfort, security, position? And if you go away with me we'll have nothing. We'll be beggars."

"It is written that the beggar who has love is richer than a mandarin with a thousand indifferent concubines." She smiled, and unwrapped the parcel she carried under her arm. "Get cups, Henry. We shall drink a toast—to our future."

He looked at the bottle as it came from its wrappings. "Rice wine. But that's Chinese, and Chinese things remind you of slavery. Why not whisky, for freedom?"

"I brought rice wine deliberately. With you, I want to be Chinese. I want to be your slave."

HE went to a closet and fumbled there for two thimble cups—one of exquisite Ming porcelain, a Soong family heirloom, dark with the patina of age; the other cheap and modern, stainlessly white.

"The Ming cup for you, my sweet." He handed them both to her. "A special cup for a special occasion. Beauty to beauty, and the common clay for me."

She accepted the dainty vessels, and he went again to the closet, pretended to search for ceremonial cakes. Actually he used the glass pane of the closet as a mirror, watched her as she surreptitiously dumped a pinch of gray powder into the cheap cup and filled it with the mild wine. When he turned, that was the cup she offered him. The death cup.

Her own, the patina-dark Ming, was also brimming.

"To us," she said, and drank with her eyes closed.

In that brief instant he dumped his poisoned wine into a pocket of his coat, then lifted the empty cup to his lips as if draining it. When she looked at him he was smiling enigmatically. It had been so ridiculously easy, this trick he had worked, and the rest of it would be easier still.

He swayed a little. "Strange!" He made his voice thick. "That wine—so strong. It goes to my head." He moved erratically to a couch on the other side of the room. "Let me lie down a moment, before we leave." He stretched himself on the cushion. "Come rest beside me, Lotus."

She went to him, nestling close, her breath warm on his cheek. It would have been pleasant to have had her so near, he reflected, if only he hadn't known what she really was. He sensed that she was watching him, waiting like some harpy for him to show signs of approaching death. And he wondered how many minutes must pass before she, herself, began to feel an inexplicable drowsiness.

He put an arm around her. "Lotus." "Yes, darling?" She stirred torpidly, her voice flat.

He sat up. "I didn't drink the poisoned wine, Lotus. But that Ming cup [Turn Page]

AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides 4 vols: \$6



Inside Trade Information for Carpenters, Builders, Joiners, Building Maintenance and all Woodworkers. These Guides give you the short-cut instructions that you must master: new methods, ideas, solutions, and the most money saving suggestions. An easy progressive course for the apprentice and student. A practical daily helper and Quick Reference for the master worker. Carpenters everywhere are taking these Guides as a help hand to easier work, better work and better pay. To get this assistance for yourself, simply fill in and mail.

Inside Trade Information On:

How to use the steel square—How to file and set saws—How to build furniture—How to use a mitre box—How to use the chalk line—How to use rules and scales—How to make joints—Carpenters arithmetic—Solving measurement problems—Estimating strength of timbers—How to set girders and sills—How to frame houses and roofs—How to estimate costs—How to build houses, barns, garages, hunglows, etc.—How to read and draw plans—Drawing up specifications—How to excavate—How to use settings 12, 13 and 17 on the steel square—How to build joists and scaffolds—skyscrapers—How to build stairs—How to put on interior trim—How to hang doors—How to lathe—lay floors—How to paint.



AUDELS Publishers, 49 W. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y. Send AUDELS Carpenters and Builders Guides, 4 vols., on 7 days' trial, 10¢ OK I will return \$1 in 7 days and \$1 monthly until \$10 paid. —Otherwise I will return them. No obligation unless I am satisfied.

Name _____
Address _____
Occupation _____
Employed by _____ PAL

U. S. GOVERNMENT JOBS!

Start as high as \$3,025 a year!

MEN—WOMEN, prepare immediately for Examinations. Veterans get preference. Write at once for free 32-page book, with list of many positions and particulars telling how to qualify for them.

FRANKLIN INSTITUTE
(Not Government Controlled)
Dept. 894, Rochester, N. Y.

OPPORTUNITIES AHEAD!

TRAIN FOR A FUTURE IN
DIESEL

Prepare for the big earning power of Diesel Trained Men. Start learning at home, in spare time. DIESEL's easy, practical training covers all phases of DIESEL engine operation, fuel systems, auxiliary equipment, repairs and maintenance. When home course is completed, you come to Chicago for actual shop practice on DIESEL MOTORS under expert instructors, at U. I.'s fine, modern school. BEGIN AT ONCE—GET ALL THE FACTS FREE. WRITE TODAY!

UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
DIVISION
2521 Sheffield Ave., Dept. 1078-D, Chicago 14, Illinois

LEARN AT HOME

TO BE A PRACTICAL NURSE

You can learn practical nursing at home in spare time. Course endorsed by physicians. Thousands of graduates. **HIGH SCHOOL NOT REQUIRED** 49th year. One graduate has charge of 10-bed hospital. Another saved \$400 while learning. Equipment included. **CHICAGO SCHOOL OF NURSING**
Dept. 422, 100 East Ohio Street, Chicago 11, Ill.
Please send free booklet, and 10 sample lesson pages.

Name _____
City _____ State _____ Age _____

CRACKS, ITCHING between TOES?

Help Yourself to Quick Relief with QUINSANA
—Amazing Results on Athlete's Foot!

Tests prove that 9 out of 10—even advanced cases—get complete relief from itching, burning Athlete's Foot after 30-day Quinsana treatment.

Quinsana's antiseptic action helps prevent the growth of the fungi that cause Athlete's Foot. It works fast to end the misery of itching, cracking, peeling between toes. And daily Quinsana use helps prevent recurrence of Athlete's Foot!

Relieve burning tired feet! Soothing, cooling Quinsana Foot Powder helps keep feet dry, comfortable. It aids in absorbing excessive perspiration. Quinsana helps combat foot odor.

Shake Quinsana on your feet. Shake it in shoes to absorb moisture. Use Quinsana every day.

MENNEN QUINSANA FOOT POWDER

SALESMEN—earn more money!!

Now—make real money in selling... prepare quickly for today's new money-making opportunities.

LeSalle's new plan trains you rapidly, thoroughly, at home. Low cost—easy terms. Over 200,000 salesmen trained by LeSalle for all lines... and big corporations have paid over a million dollars for use of same sales principles now available to you.

FREE 48-PAGE BOOKLET—"Salesmanship, the Power of Wine Success"—tells today's big opportunities, and how you can prepare for large earnings in this profitable profession. Write for your copy today—without cost or obligation.

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution, Dept. 7329-15, Chicago 6, Ill.



RUPTURE!

An amazing Air-Cushion invention allows body freedom at work or play. Light, neat, cool, sanitary. Durable, cheap. Day and night protection helps Nature support weakened muscles gently but surely. No risk. Send on Teller Write NOW for free Booklet and Proof of Results. All correspondence confidential.

Brooks Company, 183 State St., Marshall, Mich.

OLD LEG TROUBLE

Easy to use Viscose Home Method. Heals many old leg sores caused by leg congestion, varicose veins, swollen legs and ulcers or sores. No cost for trial. If it fails to show results in 10 days. Describe your trouble and get a FREE BOOK, **T. G. VISCOSSE COMPANY**, 340 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago 2, Illinois



DO YOU WANT MONEY-LOVE-LUCK!

LOADSTONES Have been carried since Egyptian times to gain MONEY-LOVE-LUCK. All legends are true in your pocket or purse. According to legend one is to draw and attract GOOD LUCK in Money, Love, Games, etc. The other is to drive away the things that keep you from getting what you desire. No supernatural claims made. Sold only as curios. Our genuine Loadstones are Highly Magnetic. You will like them. Guaranteed or your money back.

SPECIAL 3 Genuine Live Highly Magnetic Loadstones, the ancient legend of Loadstones and a special carrying bag. All for \$1.99 postpaid. (C.O.D. \$3.92). Order yours today on a Money-Back Guarantee.

OLIVER COMPANY, 3119-12 Troost, Kansas City 3, Mo.

you used—remember its dark patina? It concealed the colorless gum I smeared inside the cup, my sweet—a drugged gum from the shop of an apothecary friend of mine. Your wine dissolved it, covered its taste. Do you hear me, Lotus?"

"Wha-what!" She blinked at him stupidly.

"I'm trying to tell you that you're the one who has been drugged. Though I was kinder to you than you would have been to me. I merely gave you a sleeping potion, not a death drink such as you and George planned for me."

She tried to move, then tried to push herself off the couch. But the strength went out of her and she sagged back, comatose. A last flutter of the eyelids, and she collapsed in motionless slumber.

Henry Soong stood up, grabbed her handbag, pawed through its contents and found the confession he had written and signed hours ago. Carefully he tore it into fragments, put the pieces on an ash tray and set them afire. When the last shred had been consumed, he gathered Lotus Wang into his arms, carried her from the flat and downstairs to her sedan parked at the curb.

She made no move, no resistance, as he put her on the tonneau floor. It would be a long time before she regained consciousness.

Soong slid in under the steering wheel, mashed down on the starter. This, he told himself, was the last mile, the end of a journey to jeopardy and back.

If he got back at all.

At the apartment building, he made certain that Lotus still slept on the floor of the sedan. Then he went inside. The elevator took him upward, and a moment later he was tapping on George Wang's door.

Wang opened it, peered out, and widened his slanted eyes.

"You!" he said harshly.

"Me," Henry Soong answered, and hit him.

It was a punishing blow, with all the force of Soong's muscles riding behind it. His fist sank deep into Wang, and the man grunted like a slugged boar. He doubled over, hugging himself. Soong circled past him, sprinted across

[Turn Page]

the living room to the teakwood table where Wang kept his gun. He opened the drawer, snatched out the weapon.

"Now," he said impassively. "Now I am the master."

"I—you—I—"

"I shall make this brief. Your wife came to my flat. She said that she wanted me to take her away, to elope with her. Then she unwrapped a bottle of rice wine, and we drank. It was an odd thing, George. Shortly after that, she became ill."

WANG was shocked to the core.

"What?"

"Desperately ill," Soong lied. "I summoned a doctor, who said she had been [Turn Page]

Get Aboard the Freedom Train!



The Freedom Pledge

I am an American. A free American.
Free to Speak—without fear,
Free to worship my own God,
Free to stand for what I think right,
Free to oppose what I believe wrong,
Free to choose those who govern my country.
This heritage of Freedom I pledge to uphold
For myself and all mankind.



Not ONE... not TWO... but THREE LARGE, FIERY, FLASHY DIAMOND-CUT GEMS, NICELY MOUNTED IN GOLD FILLED or SOLID STERLING SILVER SETTING.

Brend new creation—just released by the U. S. Diamond Co.! Latest style, heavy, impressive. Full carat fiery blue-white ZIRCO gem of unusual brilliancy with 2 side 1/2-carat diamond-cut glittering, imitation diamonds. Cut, polished and hand set like diamonds. So amazing, so real-looking, it's difficult to



One Way to Tell "Real Diamonds" have fun! "Prove you've come into a fortune." If friends doubt, hold to eating (they appear on back of ring, just like on most expensive rings. A unique feature of this ring.

ZIRCO GEMS... one diamond... all... approach to GENUINE DIAMONDS

...one diamond... all... approach to GENUINE DIAMONDS

U. S. Diamond Co. 328 N. Michigan Avenue Dept. 18-J, Chicago 2, Ill.

THIS COUPON WORTH \$2.00

U. S. Diamond Co., Dept. 18-J
228 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 2, Ill.

Send MAN'S Imitation DIAMOND RING for \$4.95 plus Fed. Tax WITH this COUPON. I can return purchase in 15 days and you will refund full purchase price. (Price without Coupon is \$6.95 plus tax.)

- ☐ Diamond-style center (\$1 Imitation Diamonds).
- ☐ Ruby-style center (with Imitation Diamonds on each side).
- ☐ 14 K. gold filled mounting
- ☐ Solid Sterling Silver mounting

Ring Size _____
(Or enclose string showing ring size)

☐ Send C.O.D. plus postage.

☐ Enclosed is \$4.95 plus 20% tax (\$6.94 total). Send postage paid.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ ZONE _____ STATE _____



STUDY AT HOME Legally trained men win higher positions and bigger success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. **More Ability: More Prestige: More Money** We guide you on inside or home during spare time. Degrees of Law. We furnish all text material, including 14-volume Law Library. Low cost, easy terms. Get our valuable 60-page "Guide to Law School" and "Fiduciary" books FREE. Send NOW. **LAW EXTENSION UNIVERSITY**, 417 South Dearborn Street, Chicago 8, Ill. A Correspondence Institution Dept. 7328-L

BUY U.S. SAVINGS BONDS REGULARLY

WHO

WILL PAY YOUR BILLS



If You are laid up due to SICKNESS ACCIDENT ???

New Rainy Day Pay Check

Yes, here's the plan that provides a substitute pay check, when your regular pay check is stopped due to sickness or accident! For less than 25¢ a week, you can protect your family with this monthly disability benefit of \$30 to \$100 a month! Not a so-called limited liability policy but an all-benefit policy, with cash benefits paid from first day of disability. Includes all sickness, all accidents (heart, rupture, cancer, etc.). Ages 15 to 64.

SEND NO MONEY

Just write name, age and address. Free details will be mailed at once. Write today.


ALL-AMERICA INSURANCE AGENCY
Dept. 15-J. 45 S. Lincoln, Aurora, Ill.

\$100 - \$200 PER MO.
FOR TRAVEL ACCIDENTS

\$30 - \$100 PER MO.
FOR SICKNESS OR ACCIDENT

\$100 - \$2,500
FOR DISMEMBERMENT

\$250 - \$2,500
DEATH BENEFIT FOR TRAVEL ACCIDENTS



DO YOU WANT TO STOP TOBACCO?

Banish the craving for tobacco as thousands have with Tobacco Reducers. Write for free booklet telling of ingenious effect of tobacco and of a treatment which has relieved many men. Caution: Use only as directed.

30 Years in Business

THE NEWELL COMPANY
153 Clayton, St. Louis 5, Mo.

FREE BOOK


Used ARMY SERVICE SHOES \$1.69 PR.

Good condition—ALL SIZES Plus 25¢ Parcel Post

10 Day money back guarantee. Mail Checker M.O. No Cash.

SALE! ARMY BLANKETS released 100% all wool. Perfect for home, car, camp, etc. Only \$2.95 Plus 25¢ P.P.

MAIL ORDER LEWIS, Dept. T8-5, Box 213
699 Main Ave., Passaic, N. J.



A Penny May Bring You HAPPINESS!

Would you gamble a penny to win Happiness, Companionship, Love, Friendship, Success, through the help of a mysterious international secret organization? Then just send name and address on a post-card TODAY for your FREE Copy of great book "Mayan Mystery". It can change your whole life! Address: Ross Gentry, The Mayan order, Dept. 878, P. O. Box 2710, San Antonio, Tex.

Be Extra Careful this Year—
ONLY YOU CAN PREVENT FOREST FIRES!

poisoned, was dying. When she heard this, she became hysterical. She blurted many startling truths. She said that you had robbed the bank and murdered the watchman, and that you had extorted that confession from me earlier today in order to frame me for it. She said you had sent her to me with poisoned wine, to kill me and make it look like suicide, so that the confession I had written could be planted on me. . . . What's the matter, George. Your face is like putty."

"I—I—"

"So I slipped out of my flat, George, while she was still saying these things to the doctor. When nobody was looking, I found my confession in her purse and destroyed it. Then I came straight to you, before the doctor could get to a phone and notify the police. I came here for a purpose."

"Purpose?" Wang's lips were flaccid, his eyes crawling with a thousand worms of panic.

Soong nodded, smiled. "I could, of course, stand aside and allow you to be arrested, convicted. Instead, I am willing to give you a chance to escape. For a price, naturally."

"You want—"

"Money. The lion's share of the loot."

Wang looked at him. "So you are a thief at heart, like me."

"Let's say I'm an opportunist. How much did you get from the vault, George?"

"A hundred thousand."

"The radio report claims it was nearer a hundred and fifty."

Wang's shoulders dropped. "I have no time for argument. I admit it was a hundred and fifty thousand."

"Good. After you leave here in your car, I intend to call the police. But I shall delay my call in direct ratio to what you're willing to pay. For every five minutes' leeway it will cost you ten thousand dollars. That's two thousand dollars for every precious minute. Sixty minutes, one full hour, will be one hundred and twenty thousand dollars. That still leaves you fifty thousand for get-away expenses. Interested, George?"

Wang tottered to a suitcase against the far wall, opened it, flung out fist-

fuls of bills.

"There—take it, curse you! Grow fat on the proceeds of my crime!" Then, stuffing a few remaining packets of currency into his pocket, he made for the door. "Remember, a full hour before you notify the law. One hour. I have your promise!"

"Yes, my promise," Henry Soong agreed. And to himself he said, "It is written that the wise man keeps no bargain with criminals, lest he bring dishonor to the names of his ancestors." But on his bland, expressionless face there was no hint of what he was thinking.

He watched Wang go running from the apartment. He went to a window, looked down, and presently saw Wang wedge himself frantically into the sedan. The car spurted away on whining wheels. Then, grinning, Soong picked up the telephone and called Headquarters, asked for the head of the Chinatown squad.

[Turn Page]

EVERY STORY TRUE AND THRILLING!



Approved by Parents and Teachers

NOW ON SALE—ONLY 10c AT ALL STANDS!

Now You Can Lick Any AUTO REPAIR JOB!

In LESS Time—with LESS Work!

NOW you can "polish off" the hardest jobs the EASIEST way! Just look up make, model, job in MOTOR'S New AUTO REPAIR MANUAL and go to it! Covers every job on every car built from 1935 to 1948! Clear, illustrated step-by-step instructions "breeze you through" any job from carburetor to rear end—quickly, easily, RIGHT! Explained as simply as A-B-C!

Over 700 big 8½" x 11" pages; 200 charts; 200,000 service, repair, adjustment, replacement, tune-up facts. Over 1700 cut-away pictures and diagrams show exactly WHAT to do, HOW to do it. Used by U. S. Army and Navy, trade schools.

1948 Edition.
Examine it FREE
Examine book FREE. Unless CONVINCED it's the greatest time and money - saver you've ever owned, return it in 7 days, pay nothing. Otherwise send \$1 (plus 35c postage); then \$2 monthly for 2 months; 95c one month later.

Motor Book Dept., Desk 64H,
572 Madison Ave., New York 22, N. Y.

FREE
7-DAY
TRIAL

MOTOR'S
AUTO
REPAIR
MANUAL

Covers All Makes
Built—1935 to 1948

Over 700 big pages; 200 pages of carburetor facts, charts, illustrations. Over 800 charts, tables: Tuning-up, Carburetor, Valve Measurement, Torque Wrenches, Timing, Starting Motor, Engine Clearance, Generator, Body Service, Brakes, Front End, Specifications, etc., Engines, etc.

DETECTIVES

Home Study in Detective Training—Professionally Modernized—Recognized Instructor—Easy Payments—
INTERNATIONAL DETECTIVE TRAINING SCHOOL,
2701-T Monroe St., N. E. Washington 16, D. C.

ACCOUNTANT

BECOME AN EXPERT

Executive Accountants and C. P. A.'s earn \$1,500 to \$10,000 a year. Thousands of firms need them. We train you thoroughly at home in spare time for C. P. A.'s examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous experience unnecessary. Personal training under supervision of staff of C. P. A.'s. Examinations original and typed. Write for free book, "Accountancy, the Profession that Pays."

LASALLE Extension University, 417 So. Dearborn St.
A Correspondence Institution Dept. 7328-B Chicago 5, Ill.

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 89 years expert instruction—over 100,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK NOW!
AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 91-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

PULVEX FLEA POWDER

TWO KINDS

WITH 5% DDT

... for dogs. Kills fleas and lice quick. Keeps fleas off 5-7 days. Many home uses.

OR WITH ROTENONE

... for cats, dogs. Quickly kills fleas, lice. Kills them when put on a single spot. Pre-war formula.

BETTER KILLS 50c a box





Be an ARTIST!

—Train at Home in Your Spare Time

The fascinating field of Art offers commercial opportunities to men and women. COMMERCIAL ART, CARTOONING, DESIGNING all in one complete course. We prepare you step-by-step. Trained Artists are capable of earning \$50, \$75 or more a week. **FREE BOOK** "Art for Pleasure and Profit—" describes course and method of instruction. **TWO ART OUTFITS** included with training. **STATE AGE.** Course approved under G. I. Bill.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART, Studio 667M
1115—15th St., N. W. WASHINGTON 8, D. C.

FREE BOOK
gives details

BE A DETECTIVE
WORK HOME or TRAVEL. Experience unnecessary. **DETECTIVE** Particulars **FREE.** Write to **GEO. R. H. WAGNER, 125 W. 86th St., N. Y.**

Free for Asthma

If you suffer with attacks of Asthma and choke and gasp for breath, if restful sleep is difficult because of the struggle to breathe, don't fail to send at once to the Frontier Asthma Company for a **FREE** trial of the **FRONTIER ASTHMA MEDICINE**, a preparation for temporary symptomatic relief of paroxysms of Bronchial Asthma. No matter where you live or whether you have faith in any medicine under the sun, send today for this free trial. It will cost you nothing. Caution! Use only as directed. Address

FRONTIER ASTHMA CO.

914-B FRONTIER BLDG.

462 NIAGARA STREET

BUFFALO 1, N. Y.

HOT WATER



Don't use chilling cold water when instant hot water makes shaving, bathing, washing easier and pleasanter. Just plug into electric 110 AC or DC and you have your instant hot water when and where you want it on our 30-day guarantee. Send no money—just your name and address on postcard. We ship C.O.D. plus few pennies postage. Or we ship postpaid your order if cash accompanies.

MIDWEST MERCHANDISE MART
Dept. 1413

SHAVE

BATH

WASH

3 FOR \$7.95

ELKHORN, WIS.



BAR BELLS

Buy Direct From Factory
Save 20% to 30%

Write for Free Booklet
and Price List

INDEPENDENT IRON WORKS
3440 EAST 23RD STREET, DEPT. "G"
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

\$8.95 up

Follow the Exploits of "Tygra," Queen of the Jungle, in—

STARTLING COMICS

NOW ON SALE—ONLY 10c AT ALL STANDS!

"This is Henry Soong, receiving teller of the Merchants' First National, China-town branch," he said. "I'm phoning from the apartment of George Wang, chief teller. I suspected Wang of tonight's robbery and murder, and I came here to snoop around. I think perhaps I frightened him off, for he and his wife just skipped in a hurry. Most of the money is still here. They left it behind them in their haste. The rest of it is probably in Wang's pocket. He's driving a 'Forty-two Olds, two-tone blue, license number T-H seven-nine-nine-four. Better put out a dragnet for him on the short wave before he gets too far. And I think he's armed. It might be wise to shoot first and ask questions afterward. Right. Quite so. I'll be here waiting for your men."

He hung up, and in his mind's eye he conjured up a picture. He was no seer, no fortune-teller; and it is written that the man does not live who can foretell the future. But Henry Soong had the vision of a two-tone blue sedan roaring through the fog at high speed, and of a police prowler car closing in with blazing guns. He saw the sedan go out of control and crash.

For Lotus Wang's sake, he hoped it would be that way. Death would be far more merciful if it came to her while she lay drugged in the back of the car. As for her husband, who didn't even know she was with him, well, he would die in any case; either by a police bullet, or in the sedan's wreckage, or in the lethal chamber at San Quentin.

Whichever way it happened, Henry Soong was satisfied. He smiled, and his expression was a curious mixture of American—and inscrutable Chinese.

A LAUGH ON EVERY PAGE

CARTOON HUMOR

FEATURING AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR CARTOONISTS

Now on Sale—25c at All Stands!

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 7)

drive away in a huge black sedan.

He waited a moment, and then he followed.

The black sedan eventually slowed near a large, new apartment hotel, and turned across the sidewalk there onto a ramp running down into a basement garage. Harry parked his own car and headed for the ramp.

Looking down it, he saw that the sedan had come to a stop. Marian, her white wrap falling away from her shoulders, was trying to get a man out of the front seat. The man lurched into her arms and began slowly sinking to the concrete floor. Harry glimpsed his face.

His face was a pulpy, discolored bruise—daubed all over with blood!

That's Harry Wayne's introduction to murder in **BLACK SHEEP KILL**, by Dale Clark. Harry wasn't long in finding out that messing with murder was the surest way to a fast funeral—for himself. But, more than anything else, he knew he wanted to protect Marian in this mess.

BLACK SHEEP KILL is a breathlessly exciting story that will grip you until its very last word.

Also in the next issue will be another hilarious Willie Klump story by Joe Archibald—plus yarns by Bruno Fischer, Stewart Sterling, Robert Sidney Bowen, and many other of your favorite authors, especially selected for mystery, thrills and action. It's a first-rate assortment so—look forward to the next issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**!

LETTERS FROM READERS

DROP us a line and let us know what's on your mind. If there is anything you don't like about **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, or any of the stories in it, please let us know. We value your opinions highly, and what you say may determine how we run the magazine in the future. Or if you want to toss us a bouquet, of course we'll modestly accept that too. In any case, let's hear from YOU—by letter or postcard.

I have just finished the latest issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE** and here is my verdict. **KNOWLEDGE OF CRIME** by Wyatt Blasingsame was the best in the mag. **NEW YEAR'S PARDON** by Johnston McCulley was the worst.

[Turn Page]

False Teeth Nervous Wreck?

MAKING
YOU A

TRY IT
ON APPROVAL
Send No Money
DON'T PAY
UNLESS you
Are Delighted

NEW "MIGHTY ACTION" PLASTIC CUSHION—first Special in its
at Night—Smile Up with a New, Safe, Fit, Better than Ever

PLATE TROUBLES may not be the fault of your dentist. Shrinking GUMS or SUFFICIENT moisture need help. Dr. Day's "before-you-pay" offer tells you here is real help—more than words can say.

TRULY DIFFERENT—molds itself to mouth crevices to snug, semi-hard cushion fit. NOT a weak paste—a deluxe QUALITY plastic—becomes like coat of platinum can be easily removed by warming—without harm to plate.

ECONOMICAL—\$2 tube lasts so long, cost is usually less than 13¢ cents a day. Save money—but more important, save time and bother of pastes, pads, powder.

ONE EASY APPLICATION—LASTS 3 months to 1 YEAR

VALUABLE

FREE
BOOK

with Each Tube

How to Better
Your For and
Your Plates
With Ease—
Includes one
page of simple
directions.

DR. DAY'S
NEW DAY
PLATE
TRAINER

CLIP
Trial Offer
Coupon
NOW

for
UPPER or LOWER

DR. DAY'S DENTAL PLATE LINER,
Dept. H5, 408 S. Rampart, Los Angeles 5, Calif.
I want to try your plate liner on approval. If I am pleased,
I will mail you \$2 (cash, money order or check) within
7 days. If I am not pleased, I owe you nothing, but will
return remainder of tube instead of paying.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

TOWN _____ STATE _____

(please print name and address)

Dr. Day's
DENTAL
PLATE
LINER



ODORLESS
TASTELESS
SAFETY

Self-Hardening—
No Hasting!

YOU GET A
FULL SIZE
TUBE TO
TRY—NOT
A SAMPLE!

JUST
SPREAD
IT ON

Get into Good Paying AUTO BODY and FENDER WORK



BIG DEMAND in Auto Body and Fender work. Start training now in your spare time at home for good pay work. Practical shop experience included. U.E.I. Training covers metal work, welding, painting, etc. Placement service—or we will show you how to start your own shop. Behind U.E.I. TRAINING is a large national organization founded 1927. Write today for FREE LITERATURE—No obligation.

Approved
For Training
under G.I. Bill

AUTO-CRAFT DIVISION • UTILITIES ENGINEERING INSTITUTE
2523 Sheffield Avenue, Dept. X-7AL, Chicago 14, Illinois

High School Course at Home Many Finish in 2 Years

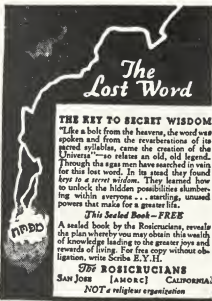
Go as rapidly as your time and abilities permit. Course equivalent to resident school work—prepares for college entrance exams. Standard H.S. texts supplied. Diploma. Credit for H.S. subjects already completed. Select subjects if desired. High school education is very important for advancement in business and industry and socially. Don't be handicapped all your life. Be a High School graduate. Start your training now. Free Bulletin on request. No obligation.
American School, Dept. H555, Drexel, at 58th, Chicago 37

CARBURETOR TOO RICH MAKES MOTORIST TOO POOR



Car owners who are wasting money and not getting proper gas mileage due to over-rich mixtures will be pleased to learn how to save gasoline by VACU-MATIC over-rich mixture. VACU-MATIC fits all cars, trucks and tractors. It is automatic and operates on the supercharge principle. Easily installed in a few minutes.

SALESMEN WANTED! Big Profit! Send name, address on penny postcard for free particulars and how to get yours for introducing.
VACU-MATIC CO., 7617-1319 W. State St., WAUKATONA, WIS.



The Lost Word

THE KEY TO SECRET WISDOM

"Like a bolt from the heavens, the word was spoken and from the revelations of its sacred syllables, came the creation of the Universe"—so relates an old, old legend. Through the ages men have searched in vain for this lost word. In its stead they found keys to a secret wisdom. They learned how to unlock the hidden possibilities slumbering within everyone... startling, unused powers that make for a greater life.

This Sealed Book—FREE

A sealed book by the Rosicrucians, reveals the plan whereby you may obtain this wealth of knowledge leading to the greater joys and rewards of living. For free copy without obligation, write Scribe E.Y.H.

THE ROSICRUCIANS
SAN JOSE [AMORC] CALIFORNIA
NOT a religious organization

SUIT YOURS

AS A BONUS

AND BIG MONEY IN SPARE TIME, TOO

We want you to wear this fine made-to-measure suit! Make it yours by sending a few orders, & earn BIG CASH PROFITS in spare time. Your suit will help you get more orders with more of this, quality fabric, tailored-to-measure in newest styles. Also ladies' tailored suits complete line. Write today for FREE SAMPLES NO EXPERIENCE, no money needed. For quick action tell us about reasons.

J. C. FIELD & SON, INC.

Harrison and Throop Sts. Dept. G-1877 Chicago 7, Ill.



MAN'S IMITATION DIAMOND RING

at special low price of **\$4.95**

A handsome, massive and rich-looking man's ring set with three large imitation diamonds. It's really a beauty. Gold filled or sterling silver.

SEND NO MONEY

Pay Postman on delivery plus 20% Fed. Tax and postage on Money-Back Guarantee.

CLARK RING CO.

Dept. 876 Box 2151 Chicago 80

LAW

STUDY AT HOME for PERSONAL SUCCESS and LARGER EARNINGS. 89 years expert instruction—over 100,000 students enrolled. LL.B. Degree awarded. All texts furnished. Easy payments. Send for FREE BOOK NOW!

AMERICAN EXTENSION SCHOOL OF LAW
Dept. 91-T, 646 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago 11, Ill.

ACCURATE TARGET SHOOTING

INDOOR OR OUT

Boone AIR TARGET PISTOL

Including 150 rds BBs

9 1/4 in. long; solid aluminum grip and body; rustless steel barrel. Postpaid if prepaid; or send \$1, with \$2.95 plus postage C.O.D.

\$3.95
POSTPAID

PRECISION SPORTS PRODUCTS, Parma 12, Mich.

NEW WRITERS NEEDED

New writers needed to re-write ideas in newspapers, magazines and books. Splendid opportunity to "break into" fascinating writing field. May bring you up to \$5.00 per hour spare time. Experience unnecessary. Write today for FREE details. NO OBLIGATION. Postcard will do.

COMFORT WRITER'S SERVICE

Dept. 36, 200 South 7th St., St. Louis, Mo.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

(Continued from page 111)

It started off with a good idea, but didn't have much punch at the end. That's what I like—punch. And more pretty girls in your stories.—Lionel Fogartee, Mineola, N. Y.

That's not a bad idea about the pretty girls. We'll see what we can do.

How long have fingerprints been used in crime-fightings? Seems to me I read somewhere that the ancient Egyptians used to take fingerprints. Is that right; or am I loopy?—Jim Bolton III, El Paso, Texas.

Far be it from us to call you loopy, Jim, but you are wrong—in a way, you're right! The ancient Egyptians and the Chinese, too, used to affix their thumbprints to documents as a sort of identifying signature or seal. But the use of fingerprints in crime-fighting is relatively modern. It wasn't until the last fifty years that police officers really got hep to the idea that no two persons could have the same fingerprints, and that, therefore, fingerprinting was a foolproof method of identification. Any other questions?



Mystery follows in the wake

of a convict's escape in

THE BIG BREAK

A Dan Fowler Novel

By C. K. M. SCANLON

in the July

G-MEN DETECTIVE

NOW ON SALE—15c AT ALL STANDS!

I laughed and laughed till the tears came into my eyes and my sides hurt when I read the Willie Klump story by Jo Archibald in the latest issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. It's the best tonic for the blues I know.—*Monica Meckton, La Canada, Cal.*

We've passed along the word to Mr. Archibald and he says he's busy mixing up more tonic—for future issues.

How about having some stories that are not really detective stories, but more like the strange, exotic and supernatural stories of which there used to be so many? I think an occasional ghost story, with a logical explanation at the end, would go nicely in **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. Otherwise the mag is tops with me.—*Frederic G. Spelvin, Elyria, Ohio.*

Watch for **MAGIC MURDER**, by Blair Reed, which will appear in an early issue of **POPULAR DETECTIVE**. We think your suggestion is a good one, Mr. Spelvin. If you other readers indicate you like this sort of thing, we will print more stories of this kind from time to time. Let us know your opinion. Also, would you like to see more girl interest in the stories?

Thanks for all your fine letters and postcards, readers. Why not join the circle of friends who write to this column? Write today, while you think of it. A postcard will do. Kindly address all communications to The Editor, **POPULAR DETECTIVE**, 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. In coming issues, we'll print excerpts from some of the best letters received. We wish we had room to print them all—but we appreciate every communication and give all comments and ideas full consideration.

—THE EDITOR.

FOR THE BEST IN FICTION
READ

POPULAR DETECTIVE

EVERY ISSUE

FREE ENLARGEMENT
of your Favorite Photo

FROM FAMOUS HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS

Just to get acquainted we will make a beautiful 6 x 7 enlargement of any picture or negative. Be sure to include color of hair, eyes and clothing and get our bargain offer for having your enlargement beautifully hand colored in oil and mounted in your choice of handsome frames. Please enclose 10c and your original picture or negative will be returned with the free 6 x 7 enlargement postpaid. Ask now! Limit 3 to a customer.

HOLLYWOOD FILM STUDIOS
7021 Santa Monica Blvd., Dept. 431, Hollywood, Calif.

**PATENTED FILTER
WHIRLCLEANS
WHIRLCOOLS
Your Smoke**



**MEDICO
FILTERED
SMOKING**

Frank Medico pipes have the replaceable filter that

- absorbs juices /
- collects flakes /
- and slugs
- reduces tongue bite

Not a hollow tube!

Only this patented filter has the 66 baffles that whirl smoke cleaner and cooler into your mouth. Replace when discolored.

Frank Medico V.F.Q. (Very Fine Quality)

Bowls of rich-grained beauty. Wide variety of shapes. With 10 filters. . . .²

Frank Medico Standard Quality, still . . .¹



S. M. FRANK & CO., INC., NEW YORK 22

INVENTORS

Learn how to protect your invention. Secure "Patent Guide" together with "Record of Invention" form—without obligation.

CLARENCE A. O'BRIEN & HARVEY JACOBSON

Registered Patent Attorneys

88-G

District National Bldg.

Washington 5, D. C.

"YOU ARE UNDER ARREST!"

Help Bring Crooks to Justice Through Scientific **CRIME DETECTION!**

We have taught thousands this exciting, profitable, pleasant profession. Let us teach you in your own home. Learn Fingerprinting, Firearms Identification, Police Photography, Secret Service Methods thoroughly, quickly, at small cost. Over 500 of all American forms of identification comply I. A. S. standards or standards. We can prepare you for this fascinating yet, day-long spare time. Write today, stating age, for "Book of Crime."

INSTITUTE OF APPLIED SCIENCE, 1920 Sunnyside Ave., Dept. 796-B, Chicago 40, Ill.



TO YOUNG WORKING GIRLS — WHETHER IN LOVE OR NOT

When a young girl goes to work, she is apt to look on her job pretty much as a fill-in between maturity and marriage.

Whether in love or not, she's confident that a handsome breadwinner will come along . . . to provide her with a nice combination of bliss and security.

"So why," she may ask, "should I save money out of what I make?"

There are a number of reasons why—all good ones. For example:

(A) The right man might not happen along

for some time.

(B) Having money of her own is a comfort to any woman, no matter how successfully she marries.

So we urge all working girls—if you're not buying U.S. Savings Bonds on a Payroll Plan, get started now.

It's an easy, painless, and automatic way to set aside money for the future. In ten years, you'll get back \$4 for every \$3 you put in.

Remember, girls—having money of your own may not make you more attractive, but it certainly won't make you *less*!

AUTOMATIC SAVING IS SURE SAVING — U.S. SAVINGS BONDS

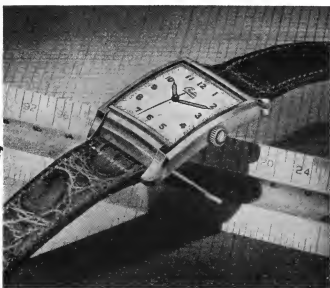


Contributed by this magazine in co-operation with the
Magazine Publishers of America as a public service.

Graduation is a great day to give a self-winding **CROTON AQUAMATIC**



A grand gift for the boy who will "amount to something!" The CROTON AQUAMATIC is handsome for all-round wear — hobbies and sports, dances or business. And it's more accurate than hand-wound watches—actually, 13.5% more accurate!* Why? Because the AQUAMATIC winds itself by the normal motions of the wrist. It can't run down, can't over-wind—stores up just enough energy for on-the-dot time.



Smart square wearproof case, curved to wrist shape. Sweep-second hand. 17 Jewels. \$59.50. Fed. Tax Included.



*Douse it! Drench it!
Soak it!*

AQUAMATIC is certified waterproof by a famous independent laboratory before it goes to your jeweler. And it will remain waterproof, provided the crystal remains intact and the case is not opened. If the watch is opened or the crystal removed, only a competent jeweler should replace the crystal and close the case to restore the water-proof quality. Other carefree features—Shock-resistant, dustproof; glass crystal can't shatter. Radium dial glows in the dark. Ask about CROTON's complete selection of men's and ladies' watches!

Write for free booklet.

CROTON WATCH CO., INC., 48 West 48th St., New York 19

Croton
AQUAMATIC

THE WORLD'S MOST CAREFREE WATCH

*3 Aquamatics were tested against the average of 9 famous watches wound by hand, in a 30-day wearing test by a leading laboratory. Aquamatic proved 13.5% more accurate!

How to surf cast at night

SAVE TIME, TROUBLE, TEMPER

According
to Raymond
Abbott,
expert surf
caster,
of Deal, N.J.



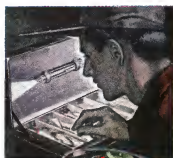
IT'S NIGHT. You're all set to make your first cast . . . BUT you know that if your line or lure is fouled, you're going to take a big chance on losing your rig. That's where your flashlight comes in handy! Bring your casting rod to a near vertical position. Spot the tackle and rod with the beam from your flashlight. Make *sure* everything's right. Better have that flashlight powered with "Eveready" batteries. They *outlast* all other brands.*



How to make night fishing easier!

FASTEN AN "EVEREADY" PEN-LIGHT

into the top of your tackle box. When you want to handle tackle, just open the lid and switch on the light. See how much time and trouble it saves you!



● Brighter light, longer life! That's what you want in a flashlight battery—and that's what you get with "Eveready" brand batteries. Laboratory tests prove it. And the best "laboratory" of all—your own flashlight—proves it! That's why "Eveready" batteries *outlast* all other brands—because they *outlast* all other brands!

*When tested in accordance with the "General-Purpose 4-Ohm Intermittent Test" devised by the American Standards Assn. This test most closely approximates average use.

The registered trade-mark "Eveready" distinguishes products of
NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
90 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N. Y.
Unit of Union Carbide and Carbon Corporation

UCC

Proof . . . in the laboratory . . . in your own flashlight . . .

"EVEREADY" BATTERIES
OUTLAST ALL OTHER BRANDS!*

